Deconstructing Imperial Representation

Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius on Nero and Domitian

By

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Für meine Eltern

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Preface

This book presents a lightly adapted version of my *Habilitationsschrift*, which was accepted by the Faculty of Languages and Literatures at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU Munich) in April 2018. I would like to thank all members of my *Habilitation* committee for their careful reading of the *Habilitationsschrift* and for providing valuable comments: Martin Hose, Dennis Pausch, and Martin Zimmermann, who also supported me as mentors during the whole process of *Habilitation*; Bardo M. Gauly and Alain M. Gowing, who served as external reviewers; and the anonymous reader of Mnemosyne Supplements.

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A number of fellowships have given me the time to focus on this book and the opportunity to present and discuss my ideas at institutions other than my home university LMU Munich. I am deeply indebted to the funding bodies that provided a Junior Researcher Fund, a Mentoring Programme Grant, a Research in the Humanities Fellowship (all LMU Munich), a Teaching Staff Mobility Programme Grant to Aarhus in Denmark (ERASMUS), a Fellowship for Young Researchers at Vandœvres-Genève in Switzerland (Fondation Hardt), and a Scholarship to present research abroad (DAAD). I am grateful to all the hosts of my visiting research fellowships, who welcomed me warmly and helped me to start, continue, and finish this project: the University of California at Berkeley; Princeton University; and the University of Washington, Seattle. The Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in Amsterdam was the ideal place to finalize this book.

This book is dedicated to my parents for their continued interest in the places and times to which I travel and for their loving support over the last decades.

Amsterdam/Munich, February 2019

INTRODUCTION

Content and Purpose of This Study

The combination of political leadership and eccentric behaviour is not only a modern phenomenon. Nor has the question of whether too much power leads to madness been raised only in our own times.[1] When we think of powerful individuals in important political roles who overstep moral boundaries, transgress social norms, and present themselves in eccentric ways, the Roman emperors inevitably come to mind. Nero's eccentricities may be the first we think of, since they have also become a topic of popular culture: most people probably know Nero the artist-emperor (as pictured in the movie *Quo vadis?*) who sang to his lyre while Rome burned.[2] The historian Tacitus says that this was a rumour, but, after reading his text, we are still inclined to believe that the mad emperor really sang. Thus in 2016 Nero was still considered a suitable object of detailed psychiatric analysis.[3] The common Roman people, at least, are often said to have enjoyed his transgressive behaviour and artistic performances. But, when the historians and Suetonius mention Nero's popularity with the people, this hardly sounds like a compliment. Is it just the intellectual elite that denigrates those in power who behave differently than expected? The emperor Domitian, who was the second Roman emperor to suffer official *damnatio memoriae* and who ended the Flavian dynasty, raises similar questions.[4] He may be less pop-

1 The usual term to describe this connection between power and madness is *Caesarenwahnsinn*. The concept became popular through Ludwig Quidde's short study on Caligula. Quidde 1894, 20 contends that the ancient texts contain "in allen wesentlichen Zügen trockene historische Wahrheit". He claims that Caligula suffered from a mental illness, the madness that is produced or supported by monarchical power. The symptoms are, according to Quidde: senseless luxury, esp. with regard to dinners and buildings; craving for military triumphs; longing for self-representation in public performances; cruelty; thinking of oneself or presenting oneself as divine. Quidde, who was winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1927, directed this depiction of monarchy and madness against the contemporary German Kaiser Wilhelm II, cf. Yavetz 1996, 118–119; Holl et al. 2001. On *Caesarenwahnsinn* from a modern psychological perspective see von Zerssen 2011.

2 Cf. the illustration in Elsner 1994, 119.

3 See Aschauer 2016 who reads Suetonius, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio in order to analyse Nero's psychological disposition. He also undertakes a medical and psychiatric case-history of the whole Julio-Claudian family.

4 On Domitian and his ending of the Flavian dynasty see Charles 2002, 48–49, who points out that Domitian's later reputation might have been completely different had he not been the last of his line. See also p.45–46.

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ular today than Nero (and has not yet found his Peter Ustinov to portray him), but he is an equally ambivalent and opalescent figure.

This study asks how, i.e. by which literary strategies, Roman historiography and biography created the negative images of Nero and Domitian that have been so persuasive and successful that readers are still disposed to trust them today. It does not inquire whether the historical Nero and Domitian really were mad. Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius employ several rhetorical devices in order to criticize forms of imperial representation they deem unacceptable. Since this critique is directed against—existing or potential—positive or neutral images of emperors and discourses about imperial representation, we can understand it as a form of deconstruction.[5] 'Deconstruction' in this sense not only builds on the reaction to a previously constructed image of the same emperor, but also aims for a new, different construction. It is thus a creative, literary process which can be analysed from a philological viewpoint. With Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius' deconstruction of imperial representation we capture three moments in the dynamic negotiations over the emperor's image that were conducted between himself and the elite.[6] In the broadest sense, this study is about the function of critical literature within this process of shaping images of the *princeps* in the early and high Roman Empire.

This book offers an innovative, and philologically and critically grounded, approach to ancient historiography through a particular combination of authors and subjects. It brings together three high-profile authors who are linked by their representations of two controversial and intrinsically fascinating emperors. In doing so, three aspects stand out. First, by uniting interpretations of Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius, whose literary techniques are not often discussed together despite the obvious overlap in subject matter, I offer the first combined reading of the works of these three authors from a philological point of view.[7] Second, my analysis of these texts aims to stimulate new views and to offer innovative interpretative strategies to readers of otherwise well-worn texts. These strategies may well find applications in reading other texts and authors beyond the present study. Third, I focus on two emperors whose

5 For the theoretical background see p.38–46.

6 In his analysis of Trajan's imperial representation Seelentag 2004 also underlines that the image of an emperor is never the final result of negotiations between him and his people, but always both the product of ongoing negotiations and the basis for future ones.

7 The brief study of Heinz 1948 about the image of Nero in Seneca, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio has to be considered outdated. Heinz reads Tacitus as characterized by a "Bestreben nach objektiver Geschichtsforschung" (Heinz 1948, 134) and Cassius Dio's books on Nero as "Produkte eines fanatischen Rhetors" (Heinz 1948, 135). He detects differences among these four authors only "im Kleinen" (Heinz 1948, 134).

treatment in the historiographical and biographical texts has a lot in common. The book is thus aimed not only at philologists, but will also allow historians to study passages on Nero and Domitian more thoroughly in the literary context of each work.

Nero and Domitian are especially suitable for this study of historiographical deconstruction because their historical and panegyrical representation was, in very different ways, transgressive and, in parts, eccentric and innovative.[8] They were both praised for it during their lifetime, but each died an unnatural death and suffered memory sanctions. There is almost no middle way between praise and critique in texts about Nero and Domitian.[9] They ended the first two dynasties, the Julio-Claudian and the Flavian. The new dynasties, under Vespasian and then Nerva and Trajan, mostly distanced themselves from their predecessors, who were from then on *exempla* of 'bad emperors' in the official imperial discourses. Everything that they had done could now be framed negatively. As negative *exempla* they played an important role in the development of the principate. Their history taught that within the system of the principate (i.e. without returning to the Republic), liberty could be achieved under a good emperor, even after a bad one.[10] In these parallels between Nero and Domitian and in other structural similarities regarding the five Julio-Claudians and the three Flavians, the Flavian dynasty can even be conceived as a short reprise of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.[11]

The texts we need for a study of Nero and Domitian and their representation have been transmitted relatively well.[12] The point of reference of deconstruction, namely the positive images of Nero and Domitian that were developed in official and unofficial media of representation, have attracted a lot of scholarly attention, which has provided a good starting point for this study.[13] Strategies of creating distance from the panegyrical literature on Nero and Domitian in later

8 Cf. Bönisch-Meyer et al. 2014a, 445–448.

9 For the one exception—a merely dull Domitian in Jewish-Christian literature—see p.46. For an ambivalent reading of panegyrics see also p.39–40, for Suetonius' (partly) positive reading of Nero and Domitian see p.318–338.

10 See Gowing 2005, 153: "But eventually, after Nero or Domitian, *libertas* could be seen as something that had been *gained*."

11 See Boyle 2003, 5–6.

12 The number of texts (both panegyrical and historiographical) available for a study of eccentric emperors is thus much larger for Nero and Domitian than for Caligula, who would be another *princeps* suitable for an analysis of the deconstruction of imperial representation.

13 For Nero's and Domitian's imperial representation cf. Bönisch-Meyer 2014b. For Neronian and Domitianic panegyric cf. Schubert 1998, Newlands 2002, Nauta 2002, Cordes 2017; see also Mause 1994 for the emperor in Latin panegyric in general.

non-historiographical literature have also been analysed.[14] The historiographical and biographical texts at the centre of this analysis are Tacitus' *Annals* (supplemented by passages from his *Histories* and *Agricola*), Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, and Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*. These authors have influenced our image of the historical Nero and Domitian enormously, yet they have never been the topic of a single philological analysis treating all three together. I have used a broad concept of 'historiography' and included Suetonius in this analysis, since biography also participates in and is closely linked to the historiographical discourse.[15] Not only is the biographer used as a source by ancient and modern historians,[16] but the genres of historiography and biography also merge: Tacitus explains events by the personality and character of an emperor, and sometimes interrupts the annual order typical of annalistic historiography; Cassius Dio's imperial books have been characterized by his device of "biostructuring".[17] Both in Tacitus and Cassius Dio the focus on individual emperors brings historiography close to biography, blurring the distinction of the two genres that is finally abandoned in the later *Historia Augusta*. In addition, narrative passages in Suetonius (e.g. death scenes) come close to historiographical accounts. We will thus have to analyse how Tacitus' and Dio's deconstruction of imperial representation is both similar to and different from Suetonius' biography, and this confrontation of historiography proper and biography will prove highly instructive for the whole study.

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14 In her study of panegyrical literature under Nero and Domitian, Cordes 2017 takes a semiotic perspective on panegyric codes that are re-coded after the emperor's death. She analyses such processes of re-coding Nero's representation in the poems of Statius and Martial, and of re-coding Domitian's represention in those epigrams of Martial written under Nerva and Trajan (Mart. 10–12), in Pliny's *Panegyricus*, the *Octavia*, and Juvenal's *Satires* 4 and 10.

15 For the close connection between biography and historiography especially in relation to Suetonius see Bradley 1985, 264, who considers biography "in a broad sense a form of historical writing", and Power 2014a, 1–2, who regards both the terms 'historian' and 'biographer' as neither satisfactory nor incorrect in the case of Suetonius. However, for ancient texts underlining the difference between historiography and biography see Polyb. 10.21 (pointing out the difference between historiography, which follows the truth, and biography, which is allowed to and has to idealize); Nep. *Pelopidas* 16.1 (on *vitam narrare* vs. *historiam scribere*); Plut. *Alex.* 1 (according to whom historiography tells of great deeds, while biography illustrates character).

16 Cf. Gascou 1984, 803. Gascou 2001, 164 has pointed out the paradox that on the one hand Suetonius never wanted to be seen as a historiographer and never intended to write historiography. In antiquity, he was understood as a biographer only. On the other hand, he does provide his readers with historical information and included in large parts the material that a historiographer would also have presented.

17 See Pelling 1997, esp. 117–125.

When looking at deconstruction of imperial representation as an important literary strategy in Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius we will have to take the whole corpus into account in each case, complementing the findings derived from the depiction of Nero and Domitian by looking at the depiction of other emperors too. This will require different approaches for the three authors, whose texts have been transmitted in very different ways: Tacitus' description of Nero's times in the *Annals* is incomplete, his books about Domitian's reign in the *Histories* are lost; Cassius Dio has mainly been preserved by Byzantine excerpts and *epitomai*; Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars* are (almost) complete. In all three cases, the text on Nero is much longer than the text on Domitian, which is why Nero in some parts of this study receives more attention than Domitian. Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius deal with different periods and different emperors. The *Annals*, the *Roman History*, and the *Lives of the Caesars* are quite distinct from each other: they are, respectively, a Latin senatorial historiography of the early second century, a Greek senatorial historiography of the third century, and a Latin collection of biographies of the early second century written by a scholar.

What is more, the three authors have attracted different scholarly attention in recent times. The literature on Tacitus is abundant; my analysis of the deconstruction of imperial representation in his work can draw on a variety of books and articles written about Tacitean style and rhetoric.[18] The *Annals* (and occasionally other Tacitean works) are thus suitable as a starting point for this analysis: part Two of this book presents the deconstruction of imperial representation from two perspectives, namely the topics of imperial representation and literary strategies of deconstruction. The specifically Tacitean mode of deconstruction will be analysed as one that leaves the reader to some degree uncertain and disconcerted. The historian Cassius Dio, on the other hand, is rarely read as a literary work, but mostly as a source for historians, although recent years have witnessed an increasing interest in his *Roman History*.[19] Part Three will therefore analyse the deconstruction of imperial representation in Cassius Dio in the broader context of the rhetorical and narratological features of the whole work, and will examine its relevance to the political and literary situation under the Severans. The biographer Suetonius has received more attention than Cassius Dio, but less than Tacitus. Research on his system of rubrics, by which he structures his material, has been conducted mostly from a historical, not a philological viewpoint.[20] Part Four will investigate the

18 See e.g. Woodman 1988, 160–196; O'Gorman 2000.

19 See e.g. Kemezis 2014; Lange/Madsen 2016; Fromentin et al. 2016.

20 See e.g. Gascou 1984; for philological studies of Suetonius cf. Lounsbury 1987; Pausch 2004.

relationship of this system of rubrics with the historiographical deconstruction of imperial representation. In doing so, we will analyse Suetonius' work in the context of both historiographical and miscellany literature.

These three core parts on individual authors each consist of three chapters. Each part starts with an introductory chapter (chapter 3, 6, and 9).[21] It is followed in each case by a chapter on the strategies of deconstruction deployed by the author (chapter 4, 7, and 10). The focus will be on Nero and Domitian, but, to show that these strategies are applied throughout the work in question, other text passages will be taken into account too. The final chapter in each part studies the techniques of deconstruction from a broader perspective and in the literary context that is decisive for each author, for which reason they include material that extends beyond the treatment of just Nero and Domitian (chapter 5, 8, and 11). Despite the parallel design of these parts, the chapters do not all offer the same kinds of information, but rather that which is needed to illustrate the mode of deconstruction in each author. For Cassius Dio, for example, we will need to know more about the difficult transmission of the text and about the author's contemporary era than for Tacitus; in the case of Suetonius, generic questions are more to the fore.

Consequently, parts Two to Four, on individual authors, bring out three idiosyncratic and specific modes of deconstructing imperial representation, and can also be read independently by readers interested in a specific author. The book aims to understand the work of each author as a whole, far more than to conduct direct comparisons of single parallel text passages. Such direct comparisons of passages are offered only occasionally and in chapter 1 as a more general introduction to the issues addressed. Chapters 10 and 11 compare the literary techniques of the biographer Suetonius to those of the historians Tacitus and Cassius Dio.[22] And the last part of the book brings all three authors together directly.

Part Five summarizes the differences in approach of the authors and the three modes of deconstruction of Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius. An Appendix points out their shared common ground, namely ancient rhetorical strategies, and is based on the textual analyses undertaken in chapters 3 through 11.

Before we turn to the three different ways of deconstructing the imperial representation of Nero and Domitian in historiography and biography (in

21 Chapter 3 is on Tacitus but introduces the topics of imperial representation and deconstruction in a more general way.

22 For a direct comparison of the historiographical texts with Suetonius see, in particular, p.334–338.

parts 2 through 5), the first part focuses on the construction of imperial images in both critical and panegyrical texts. Part One aims to illuminate two main arguments of this book, namely that literary images of emperors are artfully constructed in very diverse ways, and that the texts that criticize an emperor treat mainly the same topics as the texts that applaud the emperor, but re-interpret them. Part One is in two chapters: chapter 1 starts *medias in res* and shows by the example of passages about imperial dinners how the image of the emperors Nero and Domitian is constructed positively in panegyrical texts and deconstructed in critical historiography and biography; chapter 2, based on this analysis of textual dinners with the emperor, outlines the theoretical and methodological approaches employed in this study.

PART 1

Constructing the Emperor in Historiography and Panegyric

CHAPTER 1

Texts and Stories: On 'Dinners with the Emperor'

1 An Example: Constructing Imperial Dinners

1.1 *Literary Stories of Nero's and Domitian's Dinner Parties*

At the beginning of this book I would like us to enjoy a proper meal with Nero and Domitian, including delicious livers of scar-fish, brains of pheasants and peacocks, flamingo tongues, and innards of lamprey.[1] Depending on which textual version of these imperial figures one visits for dinner, and depending on who wrote the text about which particular experience of dining, the textual feasts will be very different. Let us first accept a dinner invitation to Suetonius' Nero. If we are lucky we will be invited to his newly built Golden Palace, the *domus aurea* (Suet. *Ner.* 31.1–2), an enormously large building including a large lake, several fields, vineyards, pasture, woodland, and baths. Everything is covered in gold, and decorated with jewels and mother-of-pearl. When we enter one of the banqueting halls we will see that their ceilings are coffered with revolving ivory panels and with pipes. This technology makes it possible to scatter flowers and spray perfume from above (*cenationes laqueatae tabulis eburneis versatilibus, ut flores, fistulatis, ut unguenta desuper spargerentur*, Suet. *Ner.* 31.2). If we dine in the principal banqueting hall we will find ourselves in a round room with a dome, revolving continuously day and night, just like the world (Suet. *Ner.* 31.2). Suetonius does not tell us what kind of dishes his Nero served, but literary accounts of feasts in Neronian times, such as those of Seneca, Petronius, Persius, or Lucan, might let us hope for oysters, sea urchins, and the aforementioned flamingo tongues.[2]

If per chance our social status is too low or if we are not close enough to the emperor to be invited to his palace, there will still be the opportunity for public dining together with Cassius Dio's Nero. He has Tigellinus, prefect of the Praetorian Guard, organize a costly and lavish banquet for the people. It takes place on an artificial lake with a platform in the middle, and taverns and booths (καπηλεῖα καὶ οἰκήματα ἐπεποίητο, Cass. Dio 62.15.3). While Nero and his entour-

1 This list of delicacies is inspired by Suet. *Vit.* 13.

2 There is nothing about Nero's dinners in these contemporary authors, although they were close to the emperor and probably dined with him several times (cf. Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002, 17), but the topic of dining in general is widely developed in Neronian literature.

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age are in the middle, the rest of the guests enjoy the taverns. There is even access for men of all orders to brothels, in which they can choose a woman of any social order, who is not allowed to refuse (Cass. Dio 62.15.5).[3]

If, however, we have a closer relationship with the emperor, we may attend a family dinner of Tacitus' Nero. Usually, Tacitus tells us, the emperors' children and other young nobles sit on their own, in sight of their relatives but at a table that provides a more frugal dinner (*propria et parciore mensa*, Tac. *Ann.* 13.16.1). However, Tacitus' Nero has his stepbrother and potential rival Britannicus poisoned at such a dinner (Tac. *Ann.* 13.16.1–4). Those guests who understand that Nero has murdered Britannicus—first of all Agrippina, Nero's mother, and Octavia, Nero's wife and Britannicus' sister—do their very best not to show it. So it only commands a short moment of silence and then the joy of the banquet recommences (*ita post breve silentium repetita convivii laetitia*, Tac. *Ann.* 13.16.4).

Most people would probably prefer another kind of feast, and may like to dine with Statius' Domitian instead. We have a literary version of both a public feast (Stat. *Silv.* 1.6) and a private dinner at his palace (Stat. *Silv.* 4.2). Statius depicts a feast for the whole city and people of all orders in *Silvae* 1.6. It takes place in the Colosseum[4] during the carnivalesque festival of the Saturnalia,[5] and includes food, drinks, gifts, and various forms of entertainment such as a gladiatorial spectacle, performances by women and dwarfs, and artificial illumination at night. Part of this "atmosphere of abundance"[6] portrayed in the poem is the special distribution of edible gifts (Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.9–27). There is a rope extended high above and stretched across the amphitheatre from which sweetmeats, the so-called *missilia*, fall down, brought from everywhere in the Empire: nuts from the Pontus, dates from Palestine (*quicquid nobile Ponticis nucetis, / fecundis cadit aut iugis Idymes*, Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.12–13), damsons from Damascus (*quod ramis pia germinat Damascos*, Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.14), figs from Caunus in Asia Minor (*et quod percoquit ebriosa Caunos*, Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.15), biscuits and pastries in the shape of human figures (*molles gaioli lucuntulique*, Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.17), apples (and pears) from Ameria (*et massis Amerina non perustis*, Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.18), must-cakes, and more dates (*et mustaceus et latente palma / praegnates caryotides cadebant*, Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.19–20).

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3 For the banquet of Tigellinus in both Cassius Dio and Tacitus see 23; 25–26.

4 Newlands 2002, 228 is sceptical about the identification of this amphitheatre with the Colosseum. Cf. also Vössing 2004, 467.

5 On the merry and inebriated atmosphere of the Saturnalia, the Roman festival of social inversion, chosen as setting for this poem cf. Nauta 2002, 398 and Newlands 2002, 227.

6 Nauta 2002, 399.

By contrast, there are no details of the menu in Statius' depiction of the more private dinner at Domitian's new palace on the Palatine, to which the poet claims to have been invited (Stat. *Silv.* 4.2). The focus in this poem, which is about a feast for senators and knights, but without the Roman *plebs* (*hic cum Romuleos proceres trabeataque Caesar / agmina mille simul iussit discumbere mensis*, Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.32–33), is on the sacral aura of the emperor (Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.14–17; 38–45).[7] The speaker of the poem does not talk to the emperor, but he observes and describes elements of the dinner: the emperor has set a thousand tables for his guests (Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.33); Ceres and Bacchus themselves serve them (Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.34–37).

Who would not prefer this kind of dinner to the ones described by Pliny the Younger in the *Panegyricus*? In Pliny's description of Domitian's feasts (Plin. *Pan.* 49.6) the emperor's position is isolated. Pliny claims that Domitian has a proper private meal earlier in the day and alone (*solitaria cena*, Plin. *Pan.* 49.6). When he finally comes to dinner, full and belching (*distentus*/*plenus*; *eructans*, Plin. *Pan.* 49.6), he provides the hungry people only with poor food, which he would not touch himself. Pliny's Domitian merely simulates a communal dinner and can hardly bear it (*aegre perpessus superbam illam convictus simulationem*, Plin. *Pan.* 49.6). In fact, he is only there to watch and spy (*spectator adnotatorque convivis tuis immines*, Plin. *Pan.* 49.6), and leaves as soon as possible to indulge secretly in gluttony (*ad cladestinam ganeam occultumque luxum*, Plin. *Pan.* 49.6).

These two Plinian reproaches—Domitian eats alone, and Domitian comes to dinner only to watch—reappear in Suetonius and Cassius Dio: Suetonius' Domitian seems to prefer to eat alone, but is less mean than Pliny's version of the emperor (Suet. *Dom.* 21). He eats so much for luncheon that he is completely glutted (*prandebatque ad satietatem*, Suet. *Dom.* 21) and barely eats and drinks anything for dinner. His banquets are numerous and generous (*convivabatur frequenter ac large*, Suet. *Dom.* 21); but they usually end early (*paene raptim*, Suet. *Dom.* 21), before sunset, and they are not followed by a drinking party (*nec ut postea comissaretur*, Suet. *Dom.* 21). Instead, Suetonius' Domitian goes for a walk on his own in a secluded spot.

Cassius Dio's Domitian, by contrast, enjoys company for dinner, albeit in a very perverse way. Like Pliny's Domitian he considers his guests to be objects to observe. He invites senators and knights to a funeral banquet which aims, or at least so it is depicted, to provoke mortal fear (Cass. Dio 67.9.1–6).[8] He prepares

7 Cf. Nauta 2002, 392 about Domitian figuring as "another object of visual wonder".

8 For a detailed discussion of this funeral banquet see Schulz 2016, 286–292.

an Underworld-like room that is completely black with black furniture. His guests arrive at night and without companions. There are gravestone-like slabs with the names of the guests on them and lamps such as one finds in tombs. Actors appear as ghosts, dance, and sit down at the feet of a guest. There are also sacrifices for the dead set before the guests, who fear, tremble, and expect their immediate death (ὥστε καὶ φοβεῖσθαι καὶ τρέμειν καθ' ἕκαστον αὐτῶν πάντας, ἀεί τε ὅσον οὐκ ἤδη σφαγήσεσθαι προσδέχεσθαι, Cass. Dio 67.9.3). Dio's Domitian then talks only of death and slaughter. When the guests are dismissed, they are accompanied by one of Domitian's people. At home, after a short break from fear, a messenger arrives from the emperor. He does not, as they expect, kill them, but provides them with presents, namely the gravestones, the dishes, and even the actor who had played the guest's spirit.

1.2 *The Social Function of Roman Imperial Dinners*

In these diverse literary stories about the commonplace situation of the imperial dinner, Nero and Domitian are presented in different roles. Whether their depictions create a positive or negative image is easy to recognize, even for the modern reader. But in order to understand how exactly such an affirmative or critical portrayal of the emperor is constructed in the text we have to be aware that a dinner in Roman antiquity was a social phenomenon that could incorporate both virtues and vices.[9] Feasting was a communal activity, no matter whether it was organized in public or more privately.[10] Public feasts for all orders and sexes were held during the games, in the theatre, or in the circus, and during festivals throughout the city.[11] A more private occasion for dinners were those given in the emperor's palace (or banquets held for the emperor).[12] These were still not private dinners in the modern sense, but they created a possibility for the upper classes to get into relatively close contact with the emperor.[13] The distinction of public feasts for everyone and private dinners

9 For a brief overview of recent works on food in general, from semiological, socio-historical, cultural, and socio-anthropological perspectives see Gowers 1993, 5–6. Roller 2001, 129–173 analyses Roman imperial dinner parties as regards the ruler-aristocrat relationship in terms of exchanging gifts.

10 For feasting as a communal activity see Braund 1996, 37–40. Vössing 2004, 272–273, is helpful for terminology: *convivium*/*convivari* may take place in the emperor's palace or outside it; *epulum* and *cena* are more often used for public feasts; *sportula* and *cena recta* differ only in the size of the portion provided.

11 Cf. Goddard 1994, 69.

12 Cf. Goddard 1994, 72.

13 Cf. Vössing 2004, 534.

for the upper classes already suggests that *convivia* were organized in accordance with social hierarchy, and so represented and confirmed social order.[14] We can understand banquets as social performances similar to festivals, in which an emperor's representation can be perceived by a large group of people face to face. As in many other situations, the emperor has to cope with a paradox: he is expected to display equality with his subjects but is in fact the only one allowed and empowered to organize public and private feasts of this kind.[15] The potentially hierarchical institution of the banquet is used to exhibit equality. This paradoxical situation, in which the emperor communicates that he is equal although everybody knows that he is not, is characteristic of the political system of the Roman principate.[16] The banquet is a perfect opportunity for and a complex form of imperial representation.[17]

During a dinner the *princeps* was expected to display two main virtues, liberality and commensality, by which he could demonstrate a good relationship with his subjects.[18] Liberality or generosity (*liberalitas*) could be shown by the food and drinks provided and by the setting or surroundings of the feast, for example an appealing programme of entertainment. Modern studies follow Paul Veyne in referring to this largesse to the Roman people as 'euergetism'.[19] A certain amount of luxury and extravagance was needed to fulfil this expectation, but there was no clear definition that distinguished adequate profusion from eccentric lavishness. This was a thin boundary that was open to debate, as we will see. Moreover, generosity had different grades depending on the social

14 This is one of the most important aspects of Roman banquets, which is often underlined. See e.g. Goddard 1994, 69–70; Roller 2001, 135; Vössing 2004, 538; Rühl 2006, 329.

15 Cf. Nauta 2002, 395 for the ideology of the common meal.

16 See e.g. Rilinger 1996, 132. This is why communication has become a central topic in studies of the principate. Emperors who manage this difficult situation and double-sided communication are usually considered 'good' by the elite (e.g. Augustus, Trajan); emperors who fail (e.g. Tiberius in Tac. *Ann.* 1.11–12) or do not accept (e.g. Caligula, see Winterling 2012, 95–98; 115–120; 175–180) these forms of communication are judged to be 'bad'. Cf. Witschel 2006, 93–94.

17 That public feasts were an important political instrument for the emperor can also be deduced from Suetonius' discussion of Nero's and Domitian's 'monopolization' of feasts. Nero is said to have cut back the luxury of his fellow members of the elite, who could not provide *publicae cenae* anymore, but only *sportulae*, an action that Suetonius mentions among Nero's positive deeds (Suet. *Ner.* 16.2). This form of public feasting by the higher orders was later abolished by Domitian, according to Suetonius (Suet. *Dom.* 7.1). For *cenae publicae* and *sportulae publicae* under Nero and Domitian see Vössing 2004, 281–284.

18 Cf. Goddard 1994, 70–71, who mentions the virtues of liberality, generosity, commensality, and *comitas*.

19 See Veyne 1990, esp. 347–377; cf. Newlands 2002, 231.

status of the recipient. To confirm social order, everyone had to be treated according to their position. The second virtue expected of the emperor concerned his behaviour towards his (or the other) guests. The emperor was supposed to display *comitas* and conviviality; that is, he was expected to eat, drink, and converse amicably with his guests, and to show himself as a friend especially to the senators.[20] In addition to a pleasant room and exquisite dinner-couches, high quality food, and good entertainment, an ideal dinner entailed friendly service, agreeable conversation, and opulent presents.[21]

A dinner or feast presented an excellent opportunity for imperial self-fashioning. Poets and historiographers accordingly created textual dinners to depict and evaluate imperial representation. In ancient Rome, how one ate and drank was generally considered an index of one's character.[22] For the emperor, the way he ate and drank and the kind of dinners and feasts he provided were indicators of how he understood his role as emperor and his regime.[23] For this reason Suetonius is very interested in the emperors' eating and drinking habits (e.g. Suet. *Aug.* 74–77; *Tib.* 42; *Dom.* 21). When he records that Augustus claimed that he ate only figs and second-class bread we can read his low culinary demands as a symbol of his low demands on the state's resources.[24] The dinner or feast is thus often a condensed way to represent the whole regime: Trajan as a good ruler also has a laudable attitude towards feasting;[25] descriptions of tyrannical meals can be read as symbols of a particular ruler's abuse of power.[26] The panegyrical and the critical versions of Nero's and Domitian's dinners draw on this same set of ideas and ideals about the emperor's social behaviour.

2 Ingredients for a Good Imperial Dinner

We can distinguish stories about Nero's and Domitian's dinners by the way the emperor's behaviour is evaluated. There are two different modes of speaking about dinners and other forms of imperial representation: simply, a panegyrical discourse praises the emperor, whereas a critical discourse assesses the

20 Cf. Newlands 2002, 261; Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002, 22.
21 Cf. Vössing 2004, 471; 534–535.
22 Cf. Goddard 1994, 68.
23 Cf. Goddard 1994, 68; Braund 1996, 51–52.
24 Cf. Gowers 1993, 21.
25 Cf. Braund 1996, 49–51.
26 Cf. Braund 1996, 46–49 on the tyrannical meal as "one specific manifestation of the abuse of power".

emperor in a negative way.[27] When we analyse the textual examples given briefly at the beginning of this chapter from the viewpoint of the social function of Roman imperial dinners, we may characterize texts of the panegyrical discourse by certain recurring themes: the emperor displays *luxuria*, *liberalitas*, a positive aura or atmosphere, and *divinity*. As the topic of imperial dinners was not developed in the Neronian panegyrical discourse, at least not in the texts that have come down to us, we have to focus on Domitianic literature.[28] It is nonetheless important to include Nero in this discussion of imperial dinners in chapter 1 because this will help us to see that the strategies of the critical texts are not the same for each emperor. They are rather chosen and applied with an eye to each emperor's alleged personality.

To start with *luxuria*,[29] dinner luxury may pertain both to the food and drinks and to the setting of the dinner party. Extravagance and lavishness are framed positively in panegyrical texts. We find many examples in Statius. The abundance of a feast organized by Domitian is compared to the Golden Age under Saturn in *Silv*. 1.6.[30] The food, as mentioned above, comes from far-off regions of the Empire (Stat. *Silv*. 1.6.12–20).[31] The description of Domitian's imperial luxury (Stat. *Silv*. 4.2.10–12; 26–31) brings out the excellence of his palace and his dining-room full of marble and gold, which are also signs of his divinity.[32] Two strategies in the panegyrical texts support this praise of luxury by suggesting a positive reading. First, the emperor's luxury during his feasts is balanced with his contrasting personal modesty. Statius describes both Domitian's generosity (Stat. *Silv*. 4.2.33–37) and his modesty (Stat. *Silv*. 4.2.42–44).[33] And second, it is closely connected with the idea of euergetism (Stat. *Silv*. 4.2.32–37).

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27 For the theoretical background of 'discourses' see p.38–43.

28 There are no panegyrical texts on Nero's feasts. For his dining-rooms in the *domus aurea* and his palace on the Palatine see Vössing 2004, 341–345. If we believe the critical texts in their description of Nero's extravagant feasts, we can at least state that he did not invent them, but was following the example of his predecessors (cf. Goddard 1994, 68 on the historical Nero).

29 *luxuria* is a metaphor from organic growth, cf. Gowers 1993, 13.

30 Cf. Nauta 2002, 399.

31 This passage also mentions flamingos. Seneca criticizes the eating of special parts of an animal only (and not the whole animal), especially of flamingo tongues, as perverse luxury (*Ep*. 110.12; cf. 78.24; cf. Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002, 11). Statius may be reacting to such forms of criticism by having Domitian provide the people with (whole) flamingos, which may thus seem luxurious but not perverse.

32 For Stat. *Silv*. 4.2 see Cordes 2017, 36–41.

33 Cf. Nauta 2002, 396. For Domitian's modesty see also Mart. 4.8.10 (*ingentique tenet pocula parca manu*); Stat. *Silv*. 5.1.121 (*dapes modicas et sobria pocula*). For Augustus see Suet. *Aug*. 76.1.

Imperial euergetism—being munificent towards the people and showing *liberalitas*—is displayed in different grades in the panegyrical texts. While the social status of the guests at the private dinner in Stat. *Silv.* 4.2 is high, Domitian's *liberalitas* towards the whole people, a group of lower social status, is praised in Stat. *Silv.* 1.6 (*una vescitur omnis ordo mensa, / parvi, femina, plebs, eques, senatus*, 43–44).[34] It is not only illustrated by the food the emperor provides during this public feast but also by the *spectacula* described. In Domitian's era, unlike in the past age of Jupiter, no one has to live frugally (Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.39–42). The setting of the Saturnalia allows for a "lifting of hierarchical barriers, inclusive of the barrier separating the emperor from his subjects" (Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.43–48).[35] This intimacy is supported by Statius' terminology, which imitates the private *convivium*,[36] and thus even adds the notion of a closer relationship with the emperor. Several other texts refer positively to Domitian's *liberalitas* towards the people, which he demonstrates by a feast in a theatre or during a spectacle. Martial, for example, praises a *sportula* offered by Domitian in 93 CE after the Sarmatian War (Mart. 8.49[50]). Although it was not a *cena recta*, a full meal taken by *patronus* and *clientes* together at a banquet, it was abundant.[37] Suetonius, although not at all an admirer of Domitian, mentions among his positive deeds that during the December festival of the Septimontium he provided the people, senators, and equestrians with an abundant feast (*largissimum epulum*, Suet. *Dom.* 4.5).[38]

In addition to descriptions of food and the setting of a feast, panegyrical texts also praise the emperor by focusing on the thoughts, feelings, and wishes of the guests. The speaker of Martial's epigrams wants to be part of the dinners: he asks the emperor for an invitation (Mart. 9.91), or begs the organizer of Domitian's dinners to read one of his epigrams during a literary performance (Mart. 4.8.7–11). Statius' poems express the joy one feels when close to the emperor during a feast (Stat. *Silv.* 1.6; 4.2.14–17). These poems focus very much on the presence and aura of the emperor as felt by the guests and expressed by the poet.[39] But the physical presence of the emperor is something ambivalent. On the one hand, the emperor is there, he is present, which creates a certain closeness with those who are in the same place. On the other hand, his

34 Cf. also Leberl 2004, 196; Rühl 2006, 329.
35 Nauta 2002, 400.
36 See Vössing 2004, 276.
37 See Vössing 2004, 274.
38 On this passage cf. Goddard 1994, 70; Nauta 2002, 401.
39 Cf. Newlands 2002, 239 and her analysis of Stat. *Silv.* 1.6, in which she points out that the emperor's actual person is never directly described but that his presence is still felt everywhere and dominates the poem.

very presence may make apparent that he is different, which creates distance between him and his guests. Both of these opposing feelings, closeness and distance, are inherent in the social construction of imperial dinners, and both are expressed in the panegyrical texts. In Stat. *Silv.* 1.6 one can see Domitian face to face (and not just a statue of him), but one still cannot talk to him.[40] In Stat. *Silv.* 4.2 Domitian gives a dinner party and is present, but there is, again, no communication between him and the speaker of the poem, which creates distance. Modern readers of these texts sometimes underline either the closeness or the distance in these feasts. If one focuses on the proximity, one can read Statius as the panegyrical poet par excellence. Bringing out the difference and distance of the emperor may result in two different interpretations. The difference may be understood as praiseworthy, because the emperor is clearly singled out among a group of people; his exceptional status is positively confirmed. Alternatively, exactly the same difference can be interpreted negatively, because it points out that the emperor is, after all, not equal, not really *inter pares*.[41]

A figure of praise in which this ambivalent feeling is condensed is the emperor's sacral aura, his divinity. Martial and Statius apply different strategies to depict Domitian during a banquet as divine or to approximate him to the gods.[42] The site and setting of his dinners are described as divine in several poems. Martial compares Domitian's *cena* for all of Rome to an Olympic feast (Mart. 8.49[50]). The amphitheatre of Stat. *Silv.* 1.6 appears as the "temple to Rome's new god".[43] The dining-hall of his palace is compared to the dining-hall of the gods (Mart. 8.39), or associated with a temple (Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.20–26).[44] Domitian is depicted as Jupiter (Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.21–27; 43–50), his cupbearer Earinus is compared to Ganymede (Stat. *Silv.* 3.4.57–59; Mart. 9.11.7; 9.16.6; 9.36).[45] The single elements of the public banquet in Statius' *Silvae* 1.6 point to Domitian's extraordinary capabilities, which transcend human power.[46] In *Sil-*

40 Cf. Newlands 2002, 234, who borrows Stephen Greenblatt's term of "privileged visibility" to describe this situation.

41 Distance in Statius' portrayal of Domitian (in *Silv.* 4.2) is underlined by Newlands 2002, e.g. 272.

42 Cf. Leberl 2004, 196 on Stat. *Silv.* 1.6; Leberl 2004, 167–181 on Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.

43 Newlands 2002, 232.

44 Cf. Nauta 2002, 392.

45 The transgressive character of these depictions is better understood if we recall that the custom of having young boys and eunuchs serve at table was criticized in Neronian literature, see e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 47.5; 47.7.

46 Cf. Newlands 2002, 233 for "the free food and gifts, the novelty, the splendour, the rapid succession of entertainers, the extension of the shows into the night by seemingly magical means".

vae 4.2 the blurring of the boundaries between human and divine during Domitian's dinner can even be considered the main motif.[47]

However, picturing the transgression from human to divine can entail difficulties, as feeling close to a god can cause different and ambiguous emotions. Reverence may result either in sublime joy or in deep fear. Readers have accordingly interpreted the texts that depict Domitian as divine as either truly panegyrical or subtly critical. Due to the inherent ambivalence of the concept of a divine emperor, the critical reading is not impossible and the ambivalent reading is not unlikely. But at the same time the panegyrical texts use several techniques to frame divinity in a positive way.[48] In Domitian's case this is done by associating his divinity with virtues and modes of behaviour that counterbalance his god-like presence. So in *Silvae* 1.6 he is praised not only for his divine aura but also for his liberality.[49] Domitian is also depicted as displaying civility when he refuses to be called *dominus* during the Saturnalian feast (Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.83–84), when Statius expresses his praise for his egalitarian attitude (Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.14–17),[50] and when Martial points out his conviviality (Mart. 8.49[50]).

3 Critical Texts: Digesting Bad Dinners

The predominantly praiseworthy notions in panegyrical texts prove to be even more ambiguous when we turn to texts that belong to a clearly critical discourse about imperial dinners. Luxury, liberality, emotions, and metaphors of absolute power are not absent from the critical texts; rather, they reappear in the form of their negative equivalents. The virtues that are carefully constructed in panegyrical discourse are deconstructed and presented as vices in the critical discourse. Luxury is present, but is re-interpreted as lavishness. Liberality is described as being practised the wrong way, towards the wrong people, and as breaching various social boundaries. The emperor's aura triggers emotions of fear and creates threatening situations. He abuses his power and misinterprets his imperial role during banquets.

47 Cf. Hardie 1983, 65: "The main theme of Silvae 4,2 is the Emperor as *deus praesens* relaxing and feasting in the *domus Flavia* (which is equated with the *caelum*) after the completion of his wars and labours." Cf. Leberl 2004, 170–171.

48 See Cordes 2017, 172–173.

49 Cf. Leberl 2004, 196 on these two main panegyrical motifs in the poem.

50 Cf. Nauta 2002, 394. On the "tension between civility and hierarchy" see Nauta 2002, 396.

3.1 *Luxury—or Lavishness?*

Nero's luxury in banquets is criticized as exceeding accepted forms of extravagance, for example in Suetonius, who treats the imperial luxury of several emperors.[51] The passage in Suetonius mentioned above about Nero's dining-hall with a revolving ceiling from which flowers and perfumes were scattered (Suet. *Ner.* 31.2) is part of Suetonius' critical treatment of Nero's *luxuria*.[52] Not even at the end of his reign, when he hears about Galba and the revolt of the Spanish provinces, does Suetonius' Nero refrain from the luxury to which he is accustomed (*luxus*; *super abundantissimam cenam*; Suet. *Ner.* 42.2). Nero's luxury is also framed negatively because it brings financial ruin to others: Suetonius' Nero invites himself to visit his friends for dinner, who have to spend four million sesterces or more for such an event (Suet. *Ner.* 27.3).[53] Receiving Nero as a guest could thus mean financial ruin to the host. A certain Montanus figures as an authority on luxury in Juvenal's fourth satire (Juv. 4.107; 130–143).[54] He is the one who solves the problem presented in the poem: a turbot has been caught that is too big for any imperial dish. Montanus, member of Domitian's imperial council and formerly an alleged connoisseur and gourmet at Nero's notorious banquets (*noverat ille / luxuriam imperii veterem noctesque Neronis*, Juv. 4.136–137), suggests the production of a giant new plate.

This *post mortem* criticism of the emperor Nero's luxurious banquets can be linked to the depiction of luxury in earlier Neronian literature. As mentioned

51 The best example of how a negative image of *luxuria* or lavishness is achieved is Suetonius' portrayal of Vitellius (Suet. *Vit.* 13.1–3), a passage that seems to draw a lot on Seneca's criticism of luxury in eating (cf. Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002, 7–17). Vitellius' behaviour in eating and drinking is interpreted negatively because he overdoes it in several ways, does not make sensible use of the institution of dinner parties, and brings ruin to others: Suetonius' Vitellius has at least three, sometimes four feasts a day (*iantacula et prandia et cenas comisationesque*, Suet. *Vit.* 13.1). Since he crosses the natural boundary given by the capacity of the stomach, he vomits regularly (see e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 108.15; 95.15 for vomiting as a sign of luxury). The food provided by his brother for his entry into Rome as emperor comes in enormous quantities. One of his platters, which he calls the shield of Minerva the Protectress, is of enormous size (*immensam magnitudinem*, Suet. *Vit.* 13.2); cf. Seneca's criticism of a contemporary stew in *Ep.* 95.28 for the disgusting mixture of ingredients presented on this platter. When someone had to invite Suetonius' Vitellius for dinner, he had to spend at least four hundred thousand sesterces (Suet. *Vit.* 13.1).

52 The rubric *luxuria* is presented in Suet. *Ner.* 30–31. Cf. Suet. *Ner.* 26.1 for the disposition of the text.

53 For Nero as guest at Otho's dinner see Suet. *Otho* 4.2; Plut. *Galba* 19.3. Cf. Vössing 2004, 326. Goddard 1994, 74 remarks that the amount of money "was ten times the property qualification necessary for holding the equestrian census in Rome".

54 See Vössing 2004, 307–308.

above there are no contemporary versions of Nero's dinners, eating, or drinking habits, but there is a lively discourse on luxurious banquets in Neronian literature in general. Persius, Pliny the Elder, Petronius, Lucan, and Seneca all talk about the lavishness of their contemporaries as concerns dinner.[55] Seneca constantly presents the notion that luxury in general, but particularly in matters of eating and drinking, is against nature.[56] He interprets luxury at banquets as a sign of a sick society (Sen. *Ep.* 114.11). After his death Nero could be pictured as an emperor at the head of the perversions of Neronian society that were depicted in the literature of his time.[57] By contrast, Domitian is reproached for being either too luxurious or avaricious, or for being too greedy: his craving for luxury is indirectly criticized by Martial and satirized by Juvenal in his fourth satire, as we have just seen.[58] Picking up and deconstructing the praise of his modesty in contemporary discourse, Pliny the Younger depicts him as greedy (Plin. *Pan.* 49.6).

3.2 *Transgressing Time and Place*

Besides transgressing accepted extravagance and turning into lavish luxury or antisocial greed, imperial dinner scenes in critical texts enact various social transgressions that are based on single elements of the *convivium* as social institution, such as its time and place, conviviality and social hierarchy, and the importance of the emperor's understanding of his role as displayed during a dinner party. A *convivium* is not supposed to last too long. When Suetonius, dealing with Nero's *scelera*, states that Nero's vices got gradually worse and that he moved on to greater misdeeds (Suet. *Ner.* 27.1), his first example is that Nero drew out his banquets from noon to midnight (*epulas a medio die ad mediam noctem protrahebat*, Suet. *Ner.* 27.2).[59] During the night (and day), Nero is also

55 Lucan also includes a famous depiction of negative luxury at banquets when portraying Caesar's luxury at a banquet held with Cleopatra in Alexandria, a passage that illustrates Caesar's development into an oriental despot (see Schmidt 1986, 251). Elements of luxury are not only the material of the dinnerware (Luc. 10.155; 160–161), the origin and quality of food (Luc. 10.155–156; 158–159; 161–163), the behaviour of the guests (Luc. 10.164–168), but also the reason for this luxury, which is not hunger but vain ambition (Luc. 10.156–158), and consists in wasting the wealth of a plundered world (Luc. 10.169). The influence of contemporary critique of luxury in popular philosophy on these passages is also noted by Schmidt 1986, 238.

56 For Neronian literature critical of luxury at dinner see Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002, 7–17.

57 Cf. Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002, 25.

58 See Mart. 12.48.11 on the Alban hills.

59 The gradual deterioration of Nero's vices, including his eating and drinking habits, is also mentioned by Cass. Dio 61.4.3. The same reproach is made of Titus, Suetonius' favourite

said to have gone on excursions and spent his time in the city's streets, brothels, and taverns in disguise, which leads to violence and murder (Tac. *Ann.* 13.25.1–3; Suet. *Ner.* 26.1–2; Cass. Dio 61.8.1–2; 61.9.2–4; 62.14.2).

There are more examples of Nero transgressing the traditional sites of banquets in critical discourse. In Naples he dines in the middle of the orchestra while a great crowd is present (*mediaque in orchestra frequente populo epulatus*, Suet. *Ner.* 20.2). In Rome, he makes the entire city his house, and provides banquets in public places (Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.1). Sometimes, he even dines in the drained Naumachia, the Campus Martius, or the Circus Maximus (Suet. *Ner.* 27.2). In the critical accounts, Nero also creates dynamic sites for banquets, dining and entertaining on boats or along the river Tiber (Suet. *Ner.* 27.3; Cass. Dio. 62[61].20.5). The most vivid example of such a meal transgressing time and place is the notorious banquet of Tigellinus mentioned briefly above, which takes place on an artificial lake (Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.1–3; Cass. Dio 62.15.2–6).[60]

Another good example of an emperor transgressing norms of place is Suetonius' Vitellius, who not only eats too much and too often, but whose eating habits are also characterized as ubiquitous. Suetonius' description of Vitellius comes close to satire: he has ship's captains and galleys bring him extravagant delicacies from Parthia and Gibraltar (Suet. *Vit.* 13.2).[61] As his appetite was immoderate, untimely, and disgraceful (*homo non profundae modo sed intempestivae quoque ac sordidae gulae*, Suet. *Vit.* 13.3), he even ate while he made sacrifices and while travelling, snatching sacrificial cake from the altar fire and eating leftovers at the inns along his route. The texts suggest that the transgression of time and place results in a lack of regular communication with the *princeps*. Interaction with the *princeps* becomes much more difficult when he dines somewhere other than expected.[62] The same issue arises from the behav-

emperor, and interpreted as *luxuria*: *luxuria ... quod ad mediam noctem comisationes cum profusissimo quoque familiarium extenderet* (Suet. *Tit.* 7.1).

60 For this notorious banquet see Goddard 1994, 75–76; Woodman 1998; Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002, 21–22; Vössing 2004, 440–444. Suetonius (*Ner.* 27.2) does not explicitly mention the banquet of Tigellinus. He gives only a brief description of an event that is similar to Tacitus' and Dio's version of this banquet. Cass. Dio 62.15.1 refers to another occasion, see Vössing 2004, 441. See also p.25–26.

61 Seneca, an older contemporary of the historical Vitellius, criticizes the luxury of his time that consists in importing food from everywhere in the Empire (e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 60.2; 89.22). Cf. Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002, 7–8. For a positive framing of the same motif see Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.12–20.

62 Cf. Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002, 18: "Extensive Gastmähler, die zur Aufgabe einer verbindlichen Zeiteinteilung führen, fungieren hier also als Chiffre für einen zum Autokratischen hin degenerierenden Herrschaftsstil."

iour of Suetonius' Domitian, although his deviance is quite different: at the time when one would usually be dining or drinking he goes for a walk alone in a secluded place (Suet. *Dom.* 21).

3.3 *Transgressing Conviviality*

Innovative times and places are not the only reason for the lack of communication with the emperor during banquets. Much worse is the refusal of conviviality, especially with the higher orders.[63] Instead of offering socially appropriate dinners for all orders, Nero is shown as dining in the wrong company and Domitian as preferably dining with no company at all.[64] We have already seen the critique of Nero spending his life in the taverns of the people. Suetonius' Nero feasts not the Roman senators but messengers from Greece, who bring him his prizes for lyre-playing. They are given precedence and made welcome at his private supper parties (*etiam familiaribus*[65] *epulis interponeret*, Suet. *Ner.* 22.3). Tacitus' Nero invites teachers of philosophy for entertainment after dinner (*etiam sapientiae doctoribus tempus impertiebat post epulas*) to enjoy the conflict of opposing opinions, and there are plenty of them interested in displaying their gloomy faces and expressions at the royal entertainments (Tac. *Ann.* 14.16.2). Nero is allegedly surrounded by disgusting creatures, such as Vatinius, who also dine with him.[66] In preferring non-traditional dinner guests Nero is again depicted as at the head of a society which is criticized for the same or similar patterns of behaviour in Neronian philosophical discourse: Seneca complains that his contemporaries randomly invite dinner guests when they have their slave-secretary (*nomenclator*) choose guests for the *cena* from the anonymous crowd present at the *salutatio* (Sen. *Ep.* 19.10–11).[67] The criticism thus pertains not only to the emperors but includes other hierarchical relationships, especially that between *patronus* and *clientes*. Suetonius' Domitian is, as mentioned above, unsocial in the opposite way: he eats so much for lunch that he is full (*prandebatque ad satietatem*) and at dinner he has only a Matian

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63 In this spirit, Cassius Dio claims that Caracalla no longer dined with the senators (Cass. Dio 78[77].18.4; cf. however Cass. Dio 79[78].8.4 on Dio as guest at a dinner of Caracalla in Nicomedia during the Saturnalia).

64 Cassius Dio chooses another, typical (cf. p.217–218) way to deconstruct Vitellius' conviviality: his Vitellius is depicted positively as he dines with the most influential people in a friendly way (Cass. Dio 64[65].7.1). However, the costs for his dinners are too high (Cass. Dio 64[65].3.2; 7.3).

65 The term *familiaris* does not refer to an especially intimate form of dining, however. See Vössing 2004, 265–266.

66 For Vatinius see Tac. *Ann.* 15.34.2 and Vössing 2004, 307; 439.

67 Cf. Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002, 14–15.

apple and a modest drink of wine from a jug (*ut non temere super cenam praeter Matianum malum et modicam in ampulla potiunculam sumeret*) (Suet. *Dom.* 21). Thus he often has large *convivia* but they end quickly and are not followed by drinking (*convivabatur frequenter ac large, sed paene raptim; certe non ultra solis occasum nec ut postea comisaretur*, Suet. *Dom.* 21). Suetonius' uncivil Domitian thus deprives his fellow elite members of the rites of communality.[68]

3.4 *Destroying Social Order*

The preference for feasts without the upper class leads to the destruction of hierarchy, which is vividly depicted in the texts. Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius use the descriptions of feasts to explain, though most of the time implicitly, why the good relations between emperors and the elite necessarily broke down.[69] But the common people were probably not following the critique expressed in these historiographical texts written by members of the elite.[70] Regarding Nero, the banquet of Tigellinus (Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.1–3; Cass. Dio 62.15.2–6) can be considered the peak of the inversion of orders and of the outbreak of public immorality, at least in Tacitus' and especially in Dio's version. Despite the differences in detail, both versions depict the banquet of Tigellinus as the climax of social transgression. Nero transgresses by turning private into public space, using the entire city as his own house (*totaque urbe quasi domo uti*, Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.1). The banquet is characterized by its extravagance and prodigality (Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.1–2), and most of all by its sexual license and wantonness.[71] The oarsmen of Nero's vessels are male prostitutes grouped according to age and sexual expertise (Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.2). The brothels on the banks of the artificial lake are filled with women of distinction (Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.3). Cassius Dio is even more explicit in showing the subversion of the orders by sexual activities at the banquet. In Dio, to revisit the passage that was briefly mentioned above, no woman, no matter whether noble or slave, young or old, virgin or married, is permitted to refuse any man (Cass. Dio 62.15.4–5): a slave could have his mistress with the master watching, a gladiator could debauch

68 Cf. Braund 1996, 40–42 on "non-participation in the shared consumption of food" as a form of deviancy. Cf. Nauta 2002, 396.

69 Even more than Nero and Domitian, Caligula is portrayed as the paradigmatic denigrator of the upper class, cf. Vössing 2004, 535–536.

70 Cf. Vössing 2004, 440. In general on Nero's popularity with the *plebs* cf. Witschel 2006, 101.

71 The motif of erotic licence at feasts is developed in other contexts too. Otho praises his wife Poppaea's looks and refinement and rouses Nero's passions for her when leaving one of the emperor's dinners (Tac. *Ann.* 13.46.1). Tacitus reports Cluvius Rufus' account that Agrippina offered herself to her son Nero incestuously during a feast (Tac. *Ann.* 14.2.1–2).

a noble girl before the eyes of her father. Dio adds that this licence ended in fighting, violence, and death for many men and women (Cass. Dio 62.15.5–6).

Domitian's reversal of hierarchy and lack of conviviality in the critical texts takes a different turn. Juvenal's Domitian hates the members of his council, and they feel their 'friendship' with the emperor as something that makes them sick (*vocantur / ergo in consilium proceres, quos oderat ille, / in quorum facie miserae magnaeque sedebat / pallor amicitiae*, Juv. 4.72–75). There is still, as in panegyrical discourse, a reciprocal relationship between emperor and elite, but it is mutually bad. *Amicitia* has become something miserable. Suetonius' Domitian shows his autocratic distance by being happy when people call him *dominus* during a feast in the amphitheatre (Suet. *Dom.* 13.1), thus acting as the opposite of Statius' Domitian (Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.83–84).[72] Cassius Dio's Domitian is, again, the worst (Cass. Dio 67.4.4–5; cf. 67.8.4). His banquets for spectators in the theatre lasting into the night are said to give pleasure to the people, but to bring ruin to the powerful (ἃ δὴ τοῖς μὲν πολλοῖς ἐν ἡδονῇ, ὡς εἰκός, ἦν, τοῖς δὲ δυνατοῖς ὀλέθρου αἴτια καθίστατο); as he does not have enough money for his expenses, he murders many rich men (Cass. Dio 67.4.5). In addition, one of the banquets is said to have been a dinner in recompense for his causing the death of many people during a spectacle at which he allowed no one but himself to put on warmer clothes during a violent storm (Cass. Dio 67.8.2–4).

3.5 *Fear and Death*

This neglect and transgression of traditional elements of the *convivium* as portrayed by Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio aims to make clear that the emperor is not properly fulfilling his political and social role. What is more, dining with the emperor is characterized as a situation of fear, crime, and death.[73] Luxury is coupled with cruelty.[74] The emperor's abuse of his power to create fear, to carry out or incite crime and deaths in the critical texts is in sharp contrast to his divine, joyful, and peaceful aura in panegyrical discourse. However, in Domitian's case descriptions of the emotions aroused at his banquets may also draw on the ambivalence in the panegyrical texts mentioned above in

72 Cf. Nauta 2002, 402: "perhaps Domitian's reluctance to be called *dominus* was so obviously feigned that a more hostile interpretation (to be made public only after his death) could easily construct it as encouragement".

73 For Caligula cf. his cruel laughter during a feast, based on his power to kill people with ease (Suet. *Calig.* 32.3).

74 Suetonius combines the rubrics of *luxuria* and *saevitia* in his *Life* of Vitellius: *luxuriae saevitiaeque deditus* (Suet. *Vit.* 13.1; cf. *Tit.* 7.1).

the context of his presence and his divinity:[75] several readers of Statius' *Silvae* detect, if not implicit criticism of the emperor, at least an ambiguous feeling. Carole Newlands interprets the comparison of Domitian with Jupiter in *Silv.* 1.6 as pointing to "the emperor as a figure to be both feared and admired".[76] According to Claudia Klodt, the portrait of Domitian reveals a certain uneasiness on the part of the poet of *Silv.* 4.2.[77] Such an ambivalence, which lies in the very nature of distant reverence, is turned into a clear and unambiguous negative feeling in critical discourse when Pliny the Younger reproaches Domitian for threatening his guests by closely observing them (Plin. *Pan.* 49.6).

In critical narratives about Nero occasions for eating and drinking even set the scene for crime and death. The emperor is depicted as both causing and experiencing fear.[78] When Tacitus' Nero hears about Agrippina's alleged plan for a revolution against him during a drinking bout, he panics (*trepidus*, Tac. *Ann.* 13.20.3) and wants to kill his mother right away. Burrus, who finally prevents him from doing so, argues among other things that Nero should take into account that he spent the night carousing (*vigilatam convivio noctem*, Tac. *Ann.* 13.20.3). With his first reaction, caused by fear, Nero acts contrary to the notion that serious issues should not be part of a *convivium*.[79] When he has people killed during a *convivium* he violates a space sacred through the law of hospitality.[80] Tacitus' Nero, who only became emperor because Claudius died at a dinner (Tac. *Ann.* 12.67.1–2), has Atticus Vestinus killed during his banquet and pictures with amusement his guests' fear of death. Suetonius' Nero plans to poison the senate during a feast (*senatum universum veneno per convivia necare*, Suet. *Ner.* 43.1). What is more, the Nero of critical discourse uses the *convivium* to kill or prepare the murder of family members. Britannicus' death, as mentioned above, takes place during a *convivium* (Tac. *Ann.* 13.16.1–4; Suet. *Ner.* 33.2–3). Before Nero tries to kill Agrippina, he invites her to a splendid banquet (Tac. *Ann.* 14.4.1–4; Suet. *Ner.* 34.2; Suet. *Otho* 3.1; Cass. Dio 62[61].13.1–2). Although the critical texts differ again in their details, they all agree that this banquet lasted long and that Nero was extremely friendly with his mother. He

75 Cf. p.18–19. For the ambivalence of the panegyrical discourse in general see p.39–40.
76 Newlands 2002, 242. Cf. Newlands 2002, 229, also on Domitian compared to Jupiter: "The threat of the unpredictable exercise of power is never absent from his representation here."
77 See Klodt 2001, 102. She also detects a "Gefühl von Bedrückung, Gefahr und Ausweglosigkeit" (Klodt 2001, 59).
78 For the depiction of mutual fear at a banquet cf. Otho's banquet in Tac. *Hist.* 1.81.
79 See Vössing 2004, 446, who refers to Sen. *Con.* 9.2.4: *scelus est in convivio damnare hominem—quid occidere?*
80 For the rights of hospitality see Vössing 2004, 445.

escorted her when she left, embraced and kissed her.[81] In critical discourse, Nero fulfils the formal requirements of the *convivium* only when he simulates them for cruel purposes.

In narratives about Domitian the focus is on feasts as part of a cruel psychological game. Suetonius' Domitian is so ingenious and unpredictable as to be extremely intimate with people and even share his supper with them shortly before he has them killed or condemned (Suet. *Dom.* 11.1). Dio's Domitian associates death with dinner even more, as we have already seen in two text passages: not only does he provide dinner after he caused mass mortality (Cass. Dio 67.8.3–4); he also gives a dinner for knights and senators which plays on their fear of death; later this dinner was called a "funeral banquet" (Cass. Dio 67.9.1–6).

3.6 *Evaluating the Imperial Role*

When we look at these critical depictions of the imperial feasts of Nero and Domitian together, we see that neglect of the imperial role is constructed in different ways. The critical texts pick up different elements from panegyrical accounts. Nero is shown as an emperor who spends too much money, luxury, and time on his *convivia*. This implies a neglect of imperial duties.[82] Domitian, by contrast, does not expend *enough* money, luxury, or time on his dinners. Whereas Nero eats and drinks with everyone everywhere and lowers himself during his nocturnal excursions,[83] Domitian prefers to dine without anyone and to remain alone.[84] By letting people call him *dominus* he puts himself in a higher position. Both of them thus have bad relations with the elite. Nero's behaviour and company is not imperial enough, insufficiently emperor-like; Domitian's behaviour, by contrast, is *too* autocratic. Both, however, show contempt for the traditional participation of the upper classes in imperial feasts.[85] We could say that Domitian, by dining mainly alone and briefly, does not even properly step into his role,[86] whereas Nero misuses his imperial role and steps out of it. Some typically Neronian features of behaviour are linked to the *convivia*, such as his artistry and loss of grip on reality: when asked by Greek legates

81 See Vössing 2004, 451. For this banquet see also Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002, 23–24.
82 Cf. Goddard 1994, 72.
83 Cf. Goddard 1994, 74.
84 Cf. Braund 1996, 44–46: "the solitude preferred by Domitian is typical of tyrants according to ancient 'kingship theory' ".
85 For Nero cf. Goddard 1994, 75.
86 In Juvenal's *Satire* 4, however, Domitian misuses his role as emperor and deems the catching of a gigantic fish to be an event that more urgently demands summoning the council of state than matters of war, cf. Newlands 2002, 261.

to sing after dinner, he agrees and thus becomes part of the entertainment programme himself (Suet. *Ner.* 22.3). After Galba's revolt, Suetonius' Nero is at first in shock, but when he recovers and receives positive news from the provinces he mocks the leaders of the rebellion during a very luxurious meal (Suet. *Ner.* 42.2). When he later, this time during lunch (*prandenti*), receives bad news again, namely that the other armies had also rebelled, he is not capable of a political reaction either (Suet. *Ner.* 47.1).

4 Conclusions Drawn from This Case Study

Banquets, feasts, and dinners organized by the emperor can be considered as social spaces in which the emperor performs his role and displays important virtues. They are an exemplary medium of imperial representation and a prominent topic in ancient literature.[87] The literary presentation of imperial dinners illuminates some characteristic features of panegyrical and critical texts, which will be crucial for the following analysis of the deconstruction of Nero's and Domitian's imperial representation in Roman historiography and biography.

(1) We have seen that literary dinner scenes deal with several topics of imperial representation at once.[88] Divinity is one such topic that is closely linked to dinners since the dinner is one of the spaces in which the emperor may appear as divine. Since a dinner needs a venue, building works and architecture as media of imperial representation are presented too.[89] Military success can be a reason to celebrate banquets and is therefore a topic linked to them in the panegyrical and critical texts: Martial connects a feast to Domitian's victory and return from the Second Pannonian War (Mart. 8.49[50]); Cassius Dio presents a dinner as recompense for the deaths caused by Domitian during the fake celebrations of a mock triumph (Cass. Dio 67.8.4). Literary accounts of imperial representation are thus complex combinations of several topics and contexts that present and discuss an emperor's image.

87 For media of imperial representation in general see p.34.

88 Stat. *Silv.* 4.2 provides an excellent example of a text that incorporates almost all elements of imperial representation (cf. Leberl 2004, 181).

89 See Stat. *Silv.* 4.2 for architecture and Domitian's palace, with Newlands 2002, 266–271. In Stat. *Silv.* 1.6 the spectacle in the theatre is more important than architecture (cf. Newlands 2002, 229). For archaeological evidence see Vössing 2004, 348; 350: Domitian's palace on the Palatine included a gigantic dining-hall on the site of Nero's *cenatio*, but its form was not new.

(2) We have been dealing with different textual transmissions. Nero and Domitian's dinners are evaluated often in panegyrical and critical texts. However, there is no positive account of Nero's dinners in the surviving literature of his own time, and we do not know how Tacitus treated Domitian's dinners, since the relevant books of the *Histories* are lost. So, to point out this important issue again, we have no description of Nero's dinners in panegyrical Neronian literature, but several accounts in critical texts. By contrast, there are many panegyrical treatments of the motif in Domitian's contemporary literature, but not many in later critical texts.[90] The basis of the texts available creates a falsely asymmetric impression, as if Domitian's dinners were treated positively whereas Nero's dinners were strongly criticized. This effect of transmission does not suggest, however, that no other discourses existed. On the contrary, we can assume that under both Nero and Domitian imperial dinners were evaluated both positively and negatively; and the same is true for the period after their death. But at different times it will have been more opportune, and held to be more valid, to say different things about their banquets in public. Some discourses will have been better left hidden, some expressed in written form, but then lost.[91] The texts that we read today will thus mirror only in part what was written and said, let alone thought and felt, about imperial representation at a certain time.

(3) This look at several different texts that are part of two discourses on imperial dinners has revealed certain relationships between these texts. Without claiming any direct dependence we can still observe that panegyrical and critical constructions of imperial dinners are closely related to each other. The critical discourse after the emperor's death seems to pick up motifs of panegyrical discourse—though not necessarily from the written texts that have been transmitted—and to transform them according to its own purposes. Martial, Statius, Pliny, Suetonius, and in part Cassius Dio agree that Domitian created distance between himself and his guests and people. But while panegyrical texts evaluate this distance as part of his difference and divinity, the critical discourse interprets the distance as arrogance, as we saw. In both cases Domitian does not clearly fulfil the virtue of conviviality and commensality, but how his deviance or transgression is to be interpreted is under negotiation: what is positively interpreted as the overstepping of a boundary into divinity is later negatively re-coded as the breaking of a boundary. In different discourses, dif-

90 Dinner in Domitian's palace is the only imperial topic dealt with by both Statius (*Silv.* 4.2) and Martial (8.30; 8.49[50]; 9.91), see Nauta 2002, 383–384.

91 On the concept of hidden discourses see p.42.

ferent interpretations are valid, and in hindsight the panegyrical discourse can almost be seen to anticipate the critical discourse.

(4) My literary analysis of texts on imperial dinners has not treated these texts as sources.[92] It is not the factuality or truth of narrative elements that interests me here, but their plausibility and validity for the argument in which they are presented.[93] When Konrad Vössing analyses Agrippina’s death in Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio he summarizes what they have in common and explains the appearance of these elements in all three texts by hypothesizing one shared source.[94] My interest, in contrast, lies in analysing the functions that these shared narrative elements fulfil within each text. When D.R. Shackleton Bailey comments on Statius’ praise of Domitian as being modest in eating and drinking (*dapes modicas et sobria pocula*, Stat. *Silv.* 5.1.121) in his Loeb edition of the *Silvae*, he refers to Suetonius; he is obviously reading the biographer as an objective author compared to the poet Statius and using Suetonius’ text to assert that Statius is telling the truth: “The Emperor was in fact a moderate eater and drinker”.[95] In this study, I will not use one author as proof to confirm or contradict what another author says. My focus is on why Domitian would be depicted as moderate by both Statius and Suetonius but not by Cassius Dio. Inquiring into the function and role of such narrative elements in different texts reveals that certain ‘figures of memory’ have different purposes and a different significance in different texts.[96] An analysis of their function is more than *Motivgeschichte*: it does not consider narrative elements to be merely *topoi*, and it contends that even as *topoi* they not only differ in important details, but have a social relevance and are meaningful when applied in different contexts.

(5) The comparison of these texts also reveals differences within a given discourse. Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio are all mostly critical of Nero and Domitian, but the contemporary and generic discourses to which their texts belong also create differences in their negative images of emperors. Tacitus uses depictions of imperial dinners to create dramatic single scenes.[97] Suetonius, who clearly separates positive deeds from negative ones in his different rubrics,

92 By contrast, Vössing 2004 treats Martial and Statius as sources equal to Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio.

93 Cf. p.42–43.

94 See Vössing 2004, 450–451.

95 Shackleton Bailey 2003, 321.

96 For the term ‘figures of memory’ see Assmann 2011, 23–28.

97 See e.g. the death of Britannicus (Tac. *Ann.* 13.16.1–4) and the scenes preceding the murderous attack on Agrippina (Tac. *Ann.* 14.4.3–4).

uses dinner scenes to structure his texts or to highlight his structure.[98] Cassius Dio often appears as a combination of the Tacitean narrative mode and the Suetonian rubric-mode.[99] Such differences in literary structures and their relevance to the depiction of imperial representation will be explored in chapters 3 to 11.

98 In Suetonius, the point at which Nero turns from *virtutes* to *vitia* is illustrated by his eating and drinking habits (Suet. *Ner.* 27); he hears of Galba's revolt and learns of the end of his reign during lunch (Suet. *Ner.* 47).

99 A Suetonian element in Dio is that the change in Nero's ways is illustrated by the example of dinners (Cass. Dio 61.4.3).

CHAPTER 2

Theory and History

The analysis of texts about dining with the emperor as presented in the previous chapter has implicitly drawn on certain theoretical and methodological concepts. I would now like to elaborate them on a more abstract level, which also requires a more complex and dense argumentation. In what follows I will revisit the issues, questions, concepts, and ideas just presented from a more theoretical perspective. I have used the terms 'representation', 'discourse', and 'deconstruction', which will now be more thoroughly defined; I have also used a concept of historiography that needs explanation. By outlining my understanding of these central terms of the study as clearly as possible I shall also present the analytical tools that will be applied, namely pragmatic discourse analysis and the hermeneutic devices of philology and rhetoric.

1 Imperial Representation: Nero and Domitian

An emperor like Nero or Domitian had to interpret his role as emperor and communicate it to his subjects. In this interpretation the image of an emperor was broadcast in several media, and not only material media, such as buildings or coins, but also performative ones, such as dinners or triumphs, of which descriptions have come down to us in texts (and images). Imperial representation had to reach different social groups, namely the upper orders, the Roman *plebs*, the people in the provinces, and the soldiers.[1] These groups expected different things from their emperor.[2] Senators and knights wanted him to present himself as an easily approachable *civilis princeps*, to make transparent decisions, confirm their honours, and treat them as if they were of equal standing.[3] They also wanted him to conceal on a symbolic level, for example by rituals such as dinners and by accepting honours they offered him, that he was in fact not only the *princeps senatus*, the first of the Senate, but also a monarch. The Roman *plebs* expected a caring *patronus* providing them with food and fun, for example during the games, a *pater patriae* figure. Provincial expectations

1 Cf. Witschel 2006, 89–93.
2 For the expectations of these different social groups cf. Seelentag 2004, 22–28.
3 For the ideal of the *civilis princeps* cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1982.

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were diverse, and regional expectations differed depending on the political history of a geographical area. Soldiers profited most from an emperor who would lead successful military campaigns and give them donatives.

The media of imperial representation that addressed these groups differed in their status. Some were more official and more controlled by the emperor than others, some were initiatives by his entourage and some were developed independently of him on a local level.[4] Closest to the emperor and organized by himself and his inner circle were his official titles and centrally minted coins, i.e. the imperial coinage. Building endeavours, statues, and inscriptions could be initiated by the emperor or by other groups such as city and provincial elites. Imperial representation thus consisted not only of official representations directed by the emperor, but also of 'unofficial' representations of his power that were offered to him by other people.[5] These less official forms could nonetheless be inspired by official portraits. Literature as a medium of representation, including panegyrics, belongs to this second category. The poetry of Martial and Statius is therefore not necessarily to be read as simple propaganda, but more generally as offering forms of imperial representation that supplement, and sometimes exaggerate, the official forms.[6] Literature, in short, participates in a larger social system involving the emperor and his subjects, the elite, the people, the soldiers, and the provincials, and it is a vital part of the discourse about imperial representation.

Several topics were expected by and expressed towards these different social groups in official and unofficial media. The emperor had to present himself in several roles, for example as a successful military leader, as benefactor of his people, builder of the city, organizer of entertainment, and as sacral or divine.[7] Due to their monarchical tradition, Eastern provinces in which monarchies had long been established were not reluctant to adopt forms of divine representation and sometimes offered them themselves.[8] Presenting an imperial image in these fields in a certain way entailed the explicit or implicit proclamation of norms and purposes for the reign, such as *virtus*, *clementia*, *iustitia*, *pietas*, or

4 See Bönisch-Meyer et al. 2014a, 438–439. On media of imperial representation see also Hose/Fuhrer 2014, 13; 15.

5 Cf. Seelentag 2004, 16; Hose/Fuhrer 2014, 12; 15.

6 See Nauta 2002, 381: "So the poets, even if dependent on other discourses, enjoyed a certain freedom in constructing their own discourse, a freedom which had to do with the more flexible and less 'official' nature of their medium." By contrast, Leberl 2004, 243 reads the *Silvae* as authentic testimony of what Domitian's court broadcasted; Rühl 2006, 357 similarly points out the reinforcing effect that the *Silvae* supply for Domitianic norms.

7 I deal with topics of imperial representation more thoroughly in chapter 3 and chapter 6.2.

8 Cf. Witschel 2006, 91–92.

liberalitas.[9] The medium of the text offered exceptional possibilities to present and develop these virtues and topics of imperial representation in narratives.[10] In panegyrical literature about Nero and Domitian six motifs of imperial representation stand out, namely imperial luxury; the size of imperial buildings; the emperor's divinity; the effect of his reign on nature and cosmos; his infinite power; and the glorification of contemporary times.[11]

In both panegyrical and historiographical texts meaning is ascribed to certain elements of an emperor's reign and behaviour. From a semiotic viewpoint we can say that a certain code is used to construct a message about the emperor.[12] The reader or, to speak more generally, the recipient may use the same code when he receives and deciphers the message. If he uses a different code the message will mean something else to him.[13] What a form of representation means to someone thus depends on the code one uses to read it. This is why the meaning of a form of representation can change: an extravagant dinner of Nero may be praiseworthy luxury to an invited guest, but senseless lavishness to a later critic. Different codes at different times result in different decodings or interpretations of imperial representation. We can thus understand imperial representation as a complex form of communication, encompassing several media, codes, and communicators. It is a reciprocal form of communication because both the emperor and his people offer forms of representation that they deem to be expected by the other groups or to be appropriate for themselves; they are either accepted or rejected. And it is a dynamic form of

9 For the status and functions of imperial virtues in general see Wallace-Hadrill 1981, who underlines that there was not one universally valid 'canon' of virtues. However, Menander rhetor (Men. Rhet. 373) presents a "more codified catalogue of the four classic virtues of a ruler, derived ultimately from Plato: courage, justice, temperance and wisdom", and the Hellenistic kingship literature develops a pool of virtues of the ruler, which were adopted by the Romans as e.g. *fortitudo*, *temperantia/continentia*, *iustitia*, *prudentia/sapientia* (Braund 1998, 57).

10 In a broader sense of the term, there are narratives in media other than texts too. Trajan's column, for example, can be analysed as narrating the story of his victory over the Dacians. See Seelentag 2004, 369–370 for the temporal and logical arrangement and the documentary way of presenting the 155 scenes.

11 This is the list of topics analysed by Cordes 2017.

12 For the semiotic theory of codes, coding, de-coding, and re-coding see Mitchell 1995, 13; Hose/Fuhrer 2014, 20–21; Cordes 2017, 7–9.

13 This ambiguity of imperial representation is reflected in the historiographical texts: when someone calls Cassius Dio's Caligula "Young Augustus" he does not take it as praise but as critique (Cass. Dio 59.13.6); similarly, he considers the inscription to a statue stating that he was consul for the second time at age 27 as critical, not as positive (Cass. Dio 59.19.2–3). Later Cassius Dio's Caracalla, who identifies himself with Alexander the Great, interprets an allusion to Alexander as subversive (Cass. Dio 78[77].8.3).

communication, since from a diachronic perspective we can observe processes of accepting or rejecting certain forms of representation, which we may also conceive as negotiations over imperial representation.[14] Literature, both panegyrical and critical, is part of this political system of communication.

These negotiations of imperial representation can best be observed in the case of emperors who experimented with traditional forms of representation, mainly by transgressing them or innovating new forms, and in emperors who suffered from what we today call *damnatio memoriae*, especially when their death also meant the end of a dynasty. Nero and Domitian thus provide excellent examples for this study, as outlined in the Introduction above. They transgressed traditional forms of imperial representation to move into styles that were at odds with the ideals of the elite.[15] Their respective successors Galba and Vespasian, and Nerva and Trajan, as hinted above, mostly refrained from forms of representation that recalled Nero or Domitian.[16] We can observe here how a change of regime is a crucial moment for the construction of cultural memory.[17] That is to say, it is an important moment of remembering and forgetting, and not least of re-coding the past, since the new regime may usually expect, allow, and require new codes and new ways of speaking.[18] This process of re-coding can be best observed in authors who wrote during two subsequent regimes, such as Seneca under Claudius and Nero, and Martial under Domitian and both Nerva and Trajan.[19]

Within this process of re-coding, the idea of the transgression of established forms of imperial representation plays an integral part. Transgression is a positive figure of thought in panegyrical literature, which claims that an exceptional *princeps* should also have exceptional ways of expressing himself, his

14 Cf. Seelentag 2004, 16; 29; Hose/Fuhrer 2014, 16 on representation as a communicative process of negotiation, which includes offers, refusals, compromises, and compulsory measures.

15 Cf. Witschel 2006, 106–108 on the common features of eccentric Roman emperors. For similar transgressions in the late Republic, esp. regarding Caesar and Pompey, see Hölscher 2009, 169–177.

16 Cf. Introduction and Cordes 2017, 4 n. 18 with further bibliography.

17 Cf. Gowing 2005, 30 on Augustus' funeral.

18 Cf. Flower 2006, 197–198; Nauta 2010 for Domitian's distance from Nero. See Leithoff 2014, 134–147 on Nero as a negative *exemplum* under the Flavians.

19 The portrayal of Claudius in Seneca's *Consolatio ad Polybium*, written during Claudius' lifetime, differs enormously from his portrayal of Claudius in the *Apocolocyntosis*, written after his death, cf. Cordes 2017, 321. For Mart. 10.72 see p.40. Gauly 2008 discusses the construction of the idealizing persona of Pliny the Younger in his letters as a literary strategy in the context of such socio-political changes from Domitian to Nerva and Trajan.

behaviour, and his power.[20] Later interpretations that read and frame transgression as something negative correspond to these positive interpretations of transgression.[21] These positive forms of representation based on the idea of transgression evidently provoked negative reactions: Martial and Statius use dinner scenes, as we have seen, to associate Domitian with Jupiter; Cassius Dio later makes him a host who resembles Hades. We could say using Jan Assmann's terminology that emperors like Nero and Domitian who transgressed accepted forms of imperial representation were 'mythomotoric':[22] their behaviour and representation was especially apt for creating stories. Whether these stories were in favour of them or against them was only partly within their control in their lifetimes and certainly not in their control after their deaths and the end of their respective dynasty, when evaluation of imperial representation and of transgressions was used to distinguish 'good' and 'bad' emperors.

Nero and Domitian belong to the group of the bad emperors.[23] Their transgressive representation is read as an expression of their badness. What is more, badness is sometimes closely connected to madness by modern interpreters.[24] But recent studies have emphasized that Nero's and Domitian's behaviour and imperial representation was much more rational than most historians' source-texts contend.[25] The texts have been characterized rather as hostile, as written by an elite that was scorned by these emperors.[26] This does not turn Nero and

20 Cf. Cordes 2017, 218–222.

21 For the breaching of boundaries as literary topic see Bartsch 1997, 13–47 (esp. 13–29) and her analysis of Lucan. While her focus is on bodily boundaries in Lucan's text, she also mentions natural, political, legal, juridical, and geographical boundaries.

22 For Assmann's term 'mythomotor of memory' see Assmann 2011, 62–69.

23 The construction of bad and good emperors is not confined to the medium of literature: e.g. Trajan's restoration coins fulfil the same purpose, in that they depict only the good emperors Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Galba, Vespasian, Titus, Nerva, but leave out the bad ones Caligula, Nero, Otho, Vitellius, Domitian (see Seelentag 2004, 411).

24 Cf. Introduction. For the characterization of Julio-Claudian *principes* as psychopaths see also Heuss ^{6}1998, 590: "Dass bei den Julisch-Claudischen Kaisern vieles ins Gebiet der Psychopathologie gehört, lässt sich auch bei der größten Skepsis gegen die Tradition nicht verhehlen." See Southern 1997, 124 for an analysis of Domitian as suffering from paranoia. See also the summary of scholarship on Domitian in Christ 2008. For Caligula see Benediktson 1989, who claims a relationship between Caligula's behaviour and a mental illness which he diagnoses as interictal temporal lobe epilepsy.

25 Wilson 2003, 524–526 warns that the rehabilitation of Domitian should not go too far, but refers especially to the works of Waters 1964, Jones 1992, and Southern 1997, who take an extreme position.

26 Cf. Champlin 2003, 37–52 for Nero (also on Pliny the Elder, Cluvius Rufus, Fabius Rusticus); Schnurbusch 2011, 286 for Domitian; Witschel 2006, 94 for senatorial historiographers judging emperors by their own expectations.

Domitian into good emperors who were slandered by offended aristocrats—and I will not, as mentioned before, pursue the question of just how bad or crazy the historical Nero and Domitian really were. Rather, it sets the emphasis once more on the fact that historiography and biography play an important role in constructing and deconstructing imperial images.

To understand and analyse the construction of the figures 'Nero' and 'Domitian' in historiographical and biographical texts we have to take other constructions of these emperors into account: their own forms of representation in official media and their portraits in art and panegyrics in general. This is not the place to give a detailed summary or overview of the historical and the panegyrical Nero and Domitian,[27] but to mention the most important figures of memory, Nero's most innovative and transgressive form of representation was his representation as artist.[28] Popular motifs regarding his reign that were used and developed differently in various discourses are his closeness to the god Apollo; his performances on stage and as charioteer; his journey to Greece, which ended with a triumph in Rome; the murder of his mother; and the Great Fire of Rome. Domitian's representation focused on military success (for example by celebrating triumphs in 83, 86, and 89 CE), and sacral exaltation. It also aimed at omnipresence:[29] his buildings were constructed throughout the whole city; a massive palace was erected on the Palatine; and his calendar regulations supported the impression of ubiquity on a temporal level.

2 Discourse and Deconstruction

In talking about imperial representation as a form of communication between the emperor and his subjects, about the media used, and the development of forms of representation, I have used the term 'discourse'. This term means various things in different languages and is used for several phenomena in English. When I apply it in this study, I refer to the entirety of expressions of a certain topic (e.g. imperial representation) in a specific way (e.g. affirmation or critique) in different media (e.g. texts, buildings), and to the particular conditions

27 There are several major historical studies of Nero and Domitian, e.g. Champlin 2003; Jones 1992; for panegyric Cordes 2017.

28 Cf. Witschel 2006, 101.

29 See Leberl 2004, 81–83; Witschel 2006, 115. Domitian's sacral aura features in all of Statius' imperial *Silvae* (see Leberl 2004, 241).

(e.g. social rules of production of media, texts, and meaning) underlying these expressions.[30] Or, to put it differently, I mean everything that is said, written, painted, sculpted, etc. about a certain topic during a specified period of time. Pragmatic discourse analysis puts emphasis on the fact that not everything that can be said at a certain time is in fact said, let alone transmitted. What is actually said and expressed depends on social structures that guide and create the discourse and which people need not be aware of. For example, a text is not seen as the product of a single individual author who is in full control of his artefact. It is rather considered as part of a complex set of rules of communication. The author did not create them and is not responsible for them; he may not even know them consciously. Discourse analysis conceives of texts as results and traces of discursive activity embedded in certain contexts, with which the texts are thus discursively connected.[31]

The 'panegyrical discourse' comprises all expressions that are affirmative of the emperor and his representation and, in Nero's and Domitian's case, it prevails during their lifetime; it precedes the critical historiographical discourse. Since the literary genre of panegyric provides numerous and highly elaborate examples of these affirmative expressions it lends its name to the 'panegyrical discourse'.[32] However, I also speak more generally about an 'affirmative discourse' at some points to recall that this discourse is not confined to literary panegyric in a strict sense. The most important panegyrical texts for this study are Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, *De clementia*, the proem of Lucan, Calpurnius Siculus' *Eclogues* 1, 4, and 7 (although the dating is debated[33]), and the *Carmina Einsidlensia* for Nero, and Statius' *Silvae* (1.1; 1.6; 4.1; 4.2; 4.3) and Martial (books 1–9) for Domitian.[34] There has been an extensive debate in scholarship, mentioned above with regard to the motif of imperial dinners, on whether the praise in these texts is meant sincerely. Several interpretations detect irony behind the surface praise, which is hidden and so not easily detectable by everyone. This theory of 'doublespeak'[35] or 'safe criticism'[36] assumes that authors of

30 I am mainly following the ideas of pragmatic discourse analysis, for which see Japp 1988; Angermüller 2001, 7–22.

31 Cf. Hose/Fuhrer 2014, 12–13.

32 For this use of 'panegyrical dicourse' and 'panegyric' in a broad sense, which is widely established in scholarly literature, see Cordes 2017, 2; 10–12, who analyses the Neronian and Domitianic panegyrical texts listed here as one corpus.

33 For the dating see Cordes 2017, 11.

34 Domitian is also a positive character in Flavius Josephus, whose *Bellum Judaicum* praises the Flavians, including Domitian, and in Frontinus' *Strategemata*.

35 Cf. Bartsch 1994, 98–147 on Tacitus and Juvenal.

36 Cf., e.g., Ahl 1984.

panegyrics, who were forced to praise the emperor during his lifetime, found a way to distance themselves from this praise by writing ambiguous texts.

This position has found supporters, but it has not been generally accepted.[37] Intermediate interpretations concede that the panegyrical texts do communicate both praise and anxiety, as we have seen interpreting the texts about Domitian's dinners. Focusing on the reader instead of the author, Stuart Hall has coined the term 'preferred reading', by which he refers to a reading of the text by a recipient who decodes the prevailing dominant code of the text in a non-oppositional way.[38] That is to say, in a preferred reading a recipient of a text of Statius would read the text as praise of Domitian. Lisa Cordes has shown that panegyrical authors under Nero and Domitian employ a major rhetorical effort to secure this preferred reading and create 'safe praise'.[39]

Nevertheless, it is not impossible to read these texts against their preferred reading, and analysing texts as literary expressions of social discourses entails a commitment to valuing their ambivalence. The reading of the text may be independent of the original intention of the author, no matter whether that was sincere praise, irony, or critique, or indeed if it was meant to be ambivalent. It depends rather on the codes used to decipher the texts, which may vary, especially after an emperor's death.[40] In fact, authors who lived (and published) both under Domitian and after his death encourage their recipients to read their old texts differently under the new circumstances. They offer a new code, we could say, to read their old texts. Martial constructs a persona of himself as a poet who was forced to praise the autocratic emperor Domitian and who can tell the truth only now after Domitian's death (Mart. 10.72).[41] Discourse analysis would not follow Tacitus when he claims that one can easily distinguish between genuine and insincere praise for emperors: *nec occultum est, quando ex veritate, quando adumbrata laetitia facta imperatorum celebrentur* (Tac. *Ann.* 4.31.2). It would, rather, read this statement as an invitation to categorize panegyrics for (retrospectively) bad emperors not just as ambiguous, but as having even become insincere by hindsight, under the changed rules and codes of a new regime.

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37 E.g. Klodt 2001 speaks for ambiguity, Römer 1994 argues against it. See also Charles 2002, 27–29 challenging the concept of safe criticism in Martial and Statius. Cf. also Hinds 1988, 27 on Ovid's panegyric (but also panegyric in general): "the matter of literary subversion is not susceptible of final proof".

38 See Hall 1980. The concept is taken up and applied to imperial panegyric by Cordes 2017, 9.

39 See Cordes 2017, 85; 308.

40 Cf. p.36.

41 On Martial and Pliny rejecting their earlier depictions of Domitian see Cordes 2017, 166–171.

By the 'critical discourse' I mean statements that exhibit distance, rejection, and criticism with regard to the emperor and his representation. 'Critical' is here used in the sense of 'negative' or 'dissenting'.[42] This discourse is especially manifest after the emperor's death. Its most important medium is critical historiography, which is why I also speak of 'historiographical discourse'.[43] Tacitus and Cassius Dio are exponents of the historiographical discourse on Nero and Domitian,[44] Suetonius of the biographical discourse on them, which is, however, closely intertwined with the historiographical discourse.[45] As the sample reading of texts on imperial dinners has shown, we find largely the same topics and motifs of imperial representation in critical discourse as in panegyrical discourse. These two discourses seem to be connected: critical discourse is somehow responding to panegyrical discourse when Domitian's divine distance, as presented in panegyrics, receives a responding interpretation in critical texts as, rather, unsociability with humans.[46] Such responses to panegyrical accounts composed during an emperor's lifetime are not confined to historiography that was written after an emperor's death.[47] The response of post-Neronian and post-Domitianic historiography to earlier panegyrical accounts of these emperors is only part of a complex process of interactions, of which we can capture different moments: it is highly probable that Flavian historiography (Fabius Rusticus, Cluvius Rufus) stood at a distance from Neronian

42 Although the adjective 'critical' is used in a number of other literary contexts I prefer 'critical discourse' to 'negative discourse' or 'dissenting discourse' because, more explicitly than the latter terms, 'critical' also encompasses the process of judgement and fault-finding that is typical of the discourse that reacts to panegyrical discourse.

43 Other critical texts are the *Octavia*, several epigrams in Martial, Juvenal (*Satires* 4 and 10), Pliny's *Panegyricus*, Philostratus' *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, and Pseudo-Lucian's *Nero*. See e.g. Juv. 8. 215–221 on Nero's crimes (the matricide, other family murders) and Nero as singer and poet of an epic on Troy.

44 Potentially, the term 'historiographical discourse' could refer to the works of all historiographers, but in a study focusing on Nero and Domitian it is naturally confined to authors who wrote about them.

45 Cf. Introduction. The same is true for Tacitus' *Agricola*, a biography with traits of a panegyrical *laudatio funebris* and of historiography.

46 Cf. p.30–31.

47 Nero's imperial representation is evaluated as negative transgression also e.g. in Stat. *Silv.* 2.7; 5.2.33; Mart. 7.45; Mart. *Spect.* 2; 28 and in the *Octavia*, Domitian's representation in Juvenal and Pliny's *Panegyricus*. Especially the Pseudo-Senecan praetexta *Octavia* often shows the same strategies as historiographical literature. It reacts to concepts of imperial representation advanced by Seneca in his *De clementia*. Whereas the historical Seneca allowed the emperor unrestricted and absolute power in *De clementia*, the figure Seneca in the *Octavia* modifies and takes back this unlimited form of power (see Manuwald 2002; Cordes 2017, 208–209). Cf. also Cordes 2017, 210–213 on Sen. *Clem.* 1.5.4 and *Oct.* 495–498.

panegyric;[48] then Domitianic panegyric reacted to critical readings of Neronian panegyric by developing new and safer forms of praise;[49] both historiography under Trajan (Tacitus) and panegyric for Trajan (Pliny) reacted to this Domitianic panegyric;[50] later Severan historiography (Cassius Dio) was responding to Severan panegyric (Septimius Severus, Aelius Antipater).[51]

The fact that we can read critical discourse after the emperor's death as a reaction to panegyrical discourse during his lifetime does not mean, however, that these discourses are strictly confined to certain periods of time. It means only that different discourses become manifest under certain circumstances and are concealed under other circumstances. We can assume that there were hidden discourses with negative expressions about Nero and Domitian during their reigns, and probably also positive expressions after their death.[52] But they have left little or no trace, for example because their only medium was oral, and neither point of view was allowed to become part of the official discourse of its time.[53] This is why there is little or no trace of these expressions of unofficial discourses. When Tacitus and Pliny insist that they could not say what they really thought under Domitian before his death they are constructing a hidden discourse by hindsight.[54]

Because of this constructivist view of the production of texts and knowledge, discourse analysis does not inquire into the truth of statements and does not aim to (re)construct historical facts.[55] The prevailing interest does not lie in asking whether something is true, but when, why, and how it is valid to say or to express something and not valid to say or express something else. This validity varies because different discourses and social worlds have different interests.[56] There are both synchronic and diachronic differences in how they

48 See Hose/Fuhrer 2014, 18.

49 See Cordes 2017, 317–320.

50 For Tacitus see chapter 3; for Pliny see Cordes 2017, 170–171; 198–203.

51 Cf. Rubin 1980, 133–193; Sidebottom 2007, 55; see also p.181–182.

52 For traces of positive *post mortem* discourses on Nero and Domitian cf. Flower 2006, 201; 208; 211; 239. See also Dio Chrys. *Or.* 21.10 for positive images of Nero.

53 This is also proposed by Seelentag 2004, 487–492, when he analyses positive and negative images of Trajan. The negative *post mortem* image of Trajan as we find it in Cassius Dio (of which Seelentag finds traces in Suetonius) must have existed already during his lifetime. For official and unofficial discourses cf. Schulz 2015 drawing on Bourdieu's concept of the 'official discourse' (Bourdieu 1987/1992) and Scott's concept of 'public' and 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 1990).

54 On the construction of hidden discourses in Tacitus see Schulz 2015.

55 Cf. p.29–32 on the texts on imperial dinners.

56 The Neronian philosophical discourse on eating, for example, although also critical of luxury, has a very different interest from the discourse on imperial representation. It puts

interpret texts, and these differences are independent of the author's original intentions. Texts are thereby read not as sources but as examples that allow us a glimpse of a certain discourse. Thus, discourse analysis is different from *Quellenforschung*.[57] It does not look at one text as the direct source of another text and try to prove dependences of transmitted (or lost) texts. Consequently the question whether the historians Tacitus and Cassius Dio and the biographer Suetonius directly read Seneca, Lucan, Martial, and Statius is not raised. We can assume that the ideas and modes of expressions in these texts lived on as part of the panegyrical discourse of imperial representation.[58] The focus is on the influence and literary interactions of whole discourses.

Indeed, motifs and topics praising imperial representation for its transgression in panegyrical discourse offered modes of speaking to which critical discourse was invited to react. When after the death of an emperor new expressions of hitherto hidden views were allowed, this was partly done by refuting—by deconstructing—old statements. Originally positive transgression is turned into something negative. The positive or at least neutral image that is constructed in a discourse affirmative of the emperor's representation is deconstructed in historiographical discourse.

I have chosen the term 'deconstruction' to refer to the methodology of a set of mechanisms in critical, mainly historiographical texts that aim to create a negative depiction of an emperor who is otherwise praised or could be imagined as praiseworthy. 'Deconstruction' is, of course, also a philosophical term introduced by Jacques Derrida. Derrida did not think of 'deconstruction' as a unified or consistent theory and did not (want to) define it.[59] The term has become a catchword applied in several cultural contexts,[60] at times leading far away from Derrida's ideas.[61] In literary theory, it usually describes a method of critical ana-

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emphasis on describing disgust and the physical problems caused by the wrong nutrition (cf. Stein-Hölkeskamp 2002, 12–13). Bad health and disgust are not discussed in historiographical discourse, by contrast, when imperial dinners are depicted.

57 Cf. Potter's overview of the aims and methods of *Quellenforschung* in Potter 1999, 90–95.

58 Cf. Hose/Fuhrer 2014, 20.

59 To clearly define 'deconstruction', which would be to "point to a single, fixed, definite meaning which stands behind and apart from all its uses", would precisely miss the philosophical point of Derridean deconstruction (Thomson 2006, 300; cf. Rapaport 2001, xi–xii on Derrida's idea of deconstruction as a "differentiated movement"; see also Rapaport 2001, 147; 149 on [not] defining Derridean deconstruction). Derrida develops his philosophy of deconstruction by taking up Heidegger's term "Destruktion", for which see Evans 1991, xix–xx.

60 Cf. Rapaport 2001, 1; Habib 2005, 649.

61 See Thomson 2006, 298 for the "popularization of the term 'deconstruction'". Rapaport

lysis that a modern scholar applies to a literary text to demonstrate that this text challenges its own meaning or creates multiple, even contradictory meanings.[62] I employ this term because I too focus on variable, non-fixed meanings of texts. The process of deconstruction in historiography that I analyse is both subversive and creative, and aims at a transformation of thinking, a feature that it shares with deconstruction in the traditional sense.[63] But departing from the traditional usage of the term, I analyse how one text or discourse reacts to and comments on another text or discourse (not on itself) and thereby tries to assign a new meaning to its message. In this study, it is thus not the modern critic who is doing the deconstruction. Rather, I introduce a novel and original approach by looking at the authors Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius as deconstructing Nero and Domitian. I will analyse the process and components of the deconstruction that the authors undertake by drawing on other critical terms and concepts, for example from the field of narratology (such as 'focalization', '*metalepsis*'/'*paralepsis*'), and memory studies (such as 'hot memory'). They provide a toolkit with which the literary techniques of the deconstruction process can be analysed in the texts.

An important element of the deconstruction that the authors are undertaking is the aforementioned re-coding of formerly positive codes: the negative depiction is implicitly set against a positive foil, which was constructed or could be constructed in a different, panegyrical discourse. This panegyrical discourse includes media of imperial representation other than literature and it also includes the aspects of aura and atmosphere, which are of great importance for an emperor. What people know about their leader may be less important than how they feel about him. Support for a leader may be based more on having a good feeling about him than on getting the facts about him right. Many texts of

2001 deals with the reception of Derrida in Anglo-American academies. For the development of Derridean techniques by the Yale critics Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, Barbara Johnson, and Harold Bloom see Habib 2015, 663, and for criticism on the Yale School's reception of Derrida see Rapaport 2001, 3–4. McQuillan 2012 presents essays that all involve deconstruction without Derrida.

62 Cf. Habib 2005, 650; Thomson 2006, 312; 314–317. A deconstructive reading of a text as practised by Derrida attempts among other things "to display logocentric operations in the text, (…) its use of presuppositions or transcendental signifieds" (Habib 2015, 654), and, more generally, the "critical questioning of philosophical assumptions" (Thomson 2006, 300), elements which do not play a role in this study. See also Culler 1983, 227–280, for examples of deconstructive criticism.

63 Derrida's deconstruction has often been reproached for being only destructive and negative, see Habib 2015, 664. See, however, Thomson 2006, 204 for constructive aspects of Derridean deconstruction.

Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius, but also many in the panegyrical discourse, are based on events that caused ambivalent emotions or emotions that could easily switch. Critical texts therefore draw on depictions of emotions, and on the arousal of emotions in their readers, in order to create persuasive images of emperors.

As the critical or historiographical discourse reacts to the panegyrical discourse, we can observe a part of the process of negotiation over imperial representation that was conducted between the *princeps* and the Roman elite, as we saw already regarding the motif of the imperial dinner. But different social groups or cultural memories evaluate Nero and Domitian differently. The impression one gets from reading Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius is that they were considered to be bad emperors relatively soon and uniformly. But this is only their image in the cultural memory of the Roman elite. Non-elite and non-Roman cultural memories show other images of the two emperors. Nero's popularity with the people and in the provinces is attested.[64] Otho's and Vitellius' references to Nero during the year of the four emperors and the appearance of the *falsi Nerones* illustrate that he still had supporters after his death.[65] Edward Champlin has questioned whether the term *damnatio memoriae* is appropriate for Nero at all.[66] Many of Domitian's actions as emperor offered plenty of potential for a positive interpretation even after his death.[67] The city of Aphrodisias, for example, did not actively pursue Domitian's *damnatio*.[68]

64 See Witschel 2006, 101–102.

65 For the *falsi Nerones* cf. Champlin 2003, 10–12: we know of three *falsi Nerones*, who appeared in March 69 CE in Greece, in 79/81 CE in Asia (Terentius Maximus), and in 88/89 CE. Cf. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 21.10 for a literary allusion to the *falsi Nerones*. See also Varner 2004, 81–83 for positive images of Nero after his death.

66 Cf. Champlin 2003, 29: "Nero's memory was *not* condemned"; "indeed the funeral had been splendid and normal, his statues reappeared in the Forum, and his acts as emperor were not abolished by the senate or his successors". See also Flower 2006, 197–233 for the negotiations of memory and the memory sanctions on Nero: for example, there is no pattern to the erasures in his inscriptions.

67 If Trajan had decided to point out the continuity of his reign with the Flavians and Domitian rather than the break from them, he could have styled Domitian as a successful military leader against the German tribes and defender of the Empire's borders, as a great builder and benefactor of Rome, and as a guardian of discipline (see Seelentag 2004, 493–494). What is more, Trajan himself offered many opportunities for a coding as bad emperor, which were not taken, however: he was victorious over the Dacians only in his second war; he adopted his victory-name too soon; he was absent from Rome for a long time, which prevented regular communication with the senate (see Seelentag 2004, 494–495).

68 See Varner 2004, 134 on the survival of a statue of Domitian in Aphrodisias and the autonomy of individual cities in responding to *damnatio memoriae*.

He was popular with the soldiers. And Trajan, despite his overall distance from Domitian, nonetheless continued some of his elements of imperial representation.[69]

Early Jewish and Christian literature treats Nero and Domitian differently. Their depictions depend on purposes linked to the cultural identity of Jews and Christians, their relationship with each other as well as with Rome, and also concern alleged persecutors of the Christians.[70] In most texts (*Fifth Sibylline Oracle*, *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, Gospel of Luke*) Nero is demonically negative while Domitian is merely dull.[71] While Christian authors such as Lactantius and Eusebius associate their eccentric imperial representation with persecutions of Christians, two Jewish texts portray Nero and Domitian as the good opposites of tyrants: Nero, persecutor of the Christians, is positive in a piece of rabbinic literature (*bGit*56a);[72] Domitian, whose wars in Europe may have seemed like a relief between the Jewish wars of Vespasian/Titus and Trajan, is even praised in the *Twelfth Sibylline Oracle* (12*Sib*124–142).[73]

3 Literature and Persuasiveness

Different social groups such as the Roman elite, the Roman people, Roman soldiers, Jewish communities, and Christian communities, remembered Nero and Domitian in very different ways. Since Roman historiography and, in part, biography was written by members of the Roman elite, it was closely connected

69 Cf. Bönisch-Meyer/Witschel 2014, 111; 140 on Trajan adopting Domitian's official victory title *Germanicus* and on *sacratissimus* as an unofficial epithet used of both Domitian and Trajan; Wolters/Ziegert 2014, 62; 70 on Trajan adopting Domitian's pose as Jupiter on coins. For Trajan's continuation of Domitian's politics see already Waters 1969.

70 For this summary of Jewish-Christian literature about Nero and Domitian see Backhaus 2014.

71 Cf. Champlin 2003, 14; 17–19; Backhaus 2014, 384; 390. The *Book of Revelation*, to be dated under Domitian or shortly afterwards, with its negative portrayal of both Nero and Domitian, is an exception; see Backhaus 2014, 379; 395, who points out that the *Book of Revelation* should be read as documenting the perception of crisis of a certain group, but not as a document typical of the province of Asia under Domitian. See also Mucha 2015, 360–361 for Nero-Domitian analogies in the *Book of Revelation*.

72 For positive traits of Nero in Jewish and Christian texts cf. Champlin 2003, 15 on the *Fifth Sibylline Oracle* and Backhaus 2014, 392 on the rabbinic *Babylonian Talmud, Gittin*.

73 See Backhaus 2014, 392: from a Jewish perspective Vespasian and Titus, and Trajan and Hadrian are much more closely connected with the Jewish-Roman wars and tensions than Domitian, whose reign, intervening between these emperors, appears peaceful in contrast.

with the cultural memory of that group. In Roman society, historiography is not distinct from memory.[74] Roman historiography can rather be considered a crucial medium of elite cultural memory. Emperors and their representation are not remembered the way they really were, if that is possible in any medium at all.[75] They are depicted the way the elite wanted them to be remembered. The *damnatio memoriae* as enacted in Roman historiography is thus not a denial of memory. It rather refers to a specific way of remembering and forgetting, of re-coding elements of cultural memory.[76]

But Roman historiography is more than just part of elite cultural memory, as becomes clear when we think of its function regarding interactions with the Roman emperor. Roman historiography is 'intentional history' in two senses.[77] It reassures the Roman elite about their image of Roman history and Roman emperors and, with regard to the process of negotiations between emperor and aristocracy, it makes offers to the emperor and future emperors about what the Roman elite is willing to accept and what not. Many points of criticism on imperial behaviour can be conceived as deviations from the imperial role as seen by the elite. What exactly counted as deviance had to be negotiated again and again. We have seen that the boundary of positive extravagance and lavish luxury at imperial dinners was not fixed: extravagance only became luxury when it was evaluated as such by a given author.[78] By confirming or mostly criticizing the transgression of certain forms of imperial representation, Roman historiography aims to implement particular norms and define boundaries of imperial representation.[79] Members of the same social group and emperors

74 For the closeness of history and memory in Greece and Rome cf. Shrimpton 1997, 15; Gowing 2005, 11–12; see Burke 1991 more generally. That Roman historiography is part of Roman elite collective memory needs to be pointed out, since Maurice Halbwachs, whose influential work stands at the beginning of modern memory studies, claimed that history and memory could be clearly separated from one another (see Assmann 2001, 28–31). When he wrote about history and historiography, however, he apparently had a very positivistic branch of historiography in mind.

75 Cf. Lorenz 1997, 17–34, and his instructive chapter on facts and interpretation, in which he underlines that even 'historical facts' are always constructed, at least insofar as they are always given from a certain perspective and in a certain language and wording, which automatically implies interpretation.

76 Cf. Flaig 1999, 66–67; Rathmann 2014, 86.

77 For the term see Foxhall et al. 2010, 9–14 where intentional history is defined as "the projection in time of the elements of subjective, self-conscious self-categorization which construct the identity of a group as a group".

78 Cf. Goddard 1994, 79.

79 For the norms relevant to the Roman elite as depicted in imperial historiography cf. Vielberg 1996; for the construction of boundaries see Hose 2011.

alike are both presented with a narrative about history that is intended to be persuasive, in the sense that the recipients are expected to agree on and accept this version of history.

Since the texts written for these purposes by rhetorically trained historians create persuasive narratives, we have to analyse them as literature, as artfully crafted texts. Their narratives involve the disposition of the narrated events, temporal and logical connections such as causation, and explicit and implicit characterization. This narrative structure of ancient historiography can be analysed with the tools of narratology, literary theory, and rhetoric.[80] I will hence often talk about 'the narrators' Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius to underline the importance of the narrative devices they apply and to draw attention to the fact that the narratives are constructions by a narrator, not 'natural' stories given by a naive witness. The narrative structure is also important from a rhetorical point of view. Quintilian considers the main purpose of historiography to be to narrate, and he sees it as close to poetry in its stylistic devices and relevance to the orator's training in style ([*Historia*] ... *est enim proxima poetis*, Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.31). Although he claims that the purpose of historiography is not to prove something, in the sense that an orator wants to prove something in a speech, historiography is to a high degree a work of rhetoric.[81] Just as panegyrical literature employs several rhetorical strategies in portraying a praiseworthy image of an emperor, historiography and biography apply rhetorical strategies when they deconstruct these images. Despite the several different approaches that Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio apply, they share a common set of rhetorical operations in their deconstruction of imperial images.[82]

In this perspective on historiography as a medium of negotiation between Roman elite and emperor, the persona of the trustworthy historian aiming to

80 Narratological analysis of classical historiography was prompted by the work of Hayden White, although he focuses on nineteenth-century historians and philosophers of history. He develops four parallel quadripartite schemes of archetypes of emplotment (Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, Satire), forms of formal argument (Formist theory, Mechanistic theory, Organicist theory, Contextualist theory), ideological implications (Anarchism, Radicalism, Conservatism, Liberalism), and Tropes (Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche, Irony). While I consider these schemes less relevant for analysing classical texts, his principal idea is important for ancient historiography too: the narrative modelling of a text (emplotment) determines how history is written and gives a specific meaning to it. A historian is influenced by certain poetic—we could say: literary—concepts that determine his view of his history and his presentation of it. See White ^{5}1985, esp. 7–42.

81 Quintilian is here distinguishing historiography from speeches, not the art of history from the art of rhetoric. Someone who writes historiography may still draw on the art of rhetoric.

82 See *Appendix*.

narrate the truth can be considered one of the strategies of persuasion, and not as proof of an objective and neutral report.[83] Historiography does, of course, have a major factual dimension, a strong relationship with the real world.[84] It is about emperors who really lived. Even if we do not claim to reconstruct this real world, we have to take into account the fact that Roman emperors were historical figures, that they had different characters and interacted with people. Some of the emperors had been contemporaries of people who were still alive at the time of writing. Whatever one contended about these emperors thus had to seem at least probable and not be too easily refuted. A textual depiction does not have to be true to be persuasive; but things are more persuasive when they appear true, which is why the belief in and struggle for truth—often opposed to rhetoric and style—is underlined in the texts.[85] Depictions of emperors, which are in fact constructions in the texts, thus appear as reconstructions of reality. The following three main parts of this book will analyse the strategies that Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius apply in their negative depictions of Nero and Domitian and their imperial representation: By which literary devices is imperial representation deconstructed? Which topics interest the authors and which literary strategies do they share? What are the specific means of deconstruction in Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius? To which literary and political discourses is each mode of deconstruction connected?

83 Cf. Marincola 1997, 1 for the historian's "literary authority, the rhetorical means by which the ancient historian claims the competence to narrate and explain the past, and simultaneously constructs a persona that the audience will find persuasive and believable".

84 Cf. Pausch 2011, 9–12 with a narratological perspective on the relationship of author and narrator.

85 See e.g. Tac. *Agr.* 10.1 who distances his own knowledge (*rerum fides*) from earlier authors writing with *eloquentia*.

PART 2

Tacitus: Deconstruction and Uncertainty

Introduction to Part 2

This second part of the book studies the Tacitean texts as part of the discourse on Nero's and Domitian's imperial representation, by which I mean the image of the emperor constructed by himself, his entourage (e.g. advisers), or others (e.g. poets), in areas such as military actions, building programmes, and divinity, areas that I will refer to as the 'topics of imperial representation'. These chapters will instruct the reader in how to read these texts as 'deconstruction': it argues that Tacitus deals with all the topics of imperial representation and that he applies a variety of literary strategies to deconstruct Nero's and Domitian's representation; however, Tacitean deconstruction, his reshaping of a positive or neutral topic into a negative one, is accompanied by uncertainty about these strategies and about interpretation in general.

The focus of interest of this part of the book lies in the literary technique of the texts that negotiate this historical topic[1] and on their potential effects, not on the personality of the historical author Tacitus.[2] I will read the depiction and deconstruction of imperial representation, historical events, and the figures of Nero and Domitian as creations of the rhetoric[3] of the text, and I will discuss the strategies that create these textual images.[4] These strategies are all part of Tacitus' toolkit of deconstruction. Since these strategies are to be studied as a general Tacitean technique relevant not only to Tacitus' depiction of Nero and Domitian, we will also look at text passages other than *Annals* 13 to 16 on the reign of Nero and the passages from the *Agricola* and the early books of the

1 Cf. Vielberg 1990, 169 on the divide between historians and philologists in scholarship on Tacitus.

2 I therefore do not aim to reconstruct the impact of Tacitus' own biography (e.g. his *Domitianerlebnis*) or his political attitude to his work, the appearance of his own voice in his texts (as does e.g. Pelling 2009b), or the mental background and context of his period (as does e.g. Rudich 1993).

3 I thus take the opposite view to Aubrion 1985, who reads Tacitean rhetoric as a factor in and means of the historian's impartiality and objective attitude (cf. Aubrion 1985, 693: "car la rhétorique est tout autant un instrument d'investigation de la réalité qu'un art de l'expression"; see, however, also Aubrion 1985, 129: "Certes il y a lieu de regretter un certain nombre d'éléments qui nous paraissent contraires à l'objectivité historique"). Cf. Santoro L'Hoir 2006, 251–252 on Tacitus and rhetoric.

4 Syme's views on Tacitus (see e.g. Syme 1958, 437: "the portrayal of Nero corresponds in large measure with the facts") are still influential, though often criticized (see e.g. Rubiés 1994, 40: "Tacitus' Nero is a literary figure, rather than the casual result of impartial historical reconstruction"). The aspect of literary constructions in ancient historiography is underlined e.g. in the articles in Elsner/Masters 1994 and by Haynes 2003.

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Histories on Domitian.[5] Due to the amount of surviving text in each case, more attention will be given to Tacitus' Nero than to Tacitus' Domitian.

Chapter 3 presents an overview of the motifs of Nero's and Domitian's imperial representation. The focus will be on how certain topics dealt with in the contemporary representation and panegyrical texts reappear later in Tacitus and are deconstructed. On some topics and aspects of Domitian's representation, the surviving text does not allow a conclusion about how Domitian's historical and panegyrical representation was reflected by Tacitus. To supplement the picture, we will sometimes draw on other critical texts such as Pliny's *Panegyricus* and Juvenal's *Satires*. Chapter 4 moves on from the topics of imperial representation to the literary strategies that deconstruct imperial representation in Tacitus, at times still with an eye on panegyrical literature but mainly focusing now on the *Annals*, the *Histories*, and the *Agricola*. It analyses the presentation of 'facts' and their connotations, the characters depicted, and their motives, as well as the forms of logical construction that are described in and which underlie the texts. To do so, it focuses on the rhetoricity of the texts and integrates narratological approaches. Chapter 5 broadens the perspective to the specifically Tacitean context in which the strategies of deconstructing imperial representation operate. Drawing on modern literary theories that engage with textual uncertainty, we will analyse the role of alternative variants of events and explanations given in the text, and discuss the function of binary oppositions within Tacitus' interpretation of history.

5 I have read and used for some of my paraphrases the translations of Yardley 2008, Levene/Fyfe 1997, and Birley 2009, as well as current Loeb translations of Tacitus and other authors.

CHAPTER 3

Imperial Representation and Topics of Deconstruction

1 Military Actions: From Peace to Inactivity, from Victory to Hypocrisy

1.1 *Recoding Peace and Victory*

One of the emperor's main roles and one of his main topics of representation was as military leader. Not only the soldiers, but also the senate and people expected the Roman emperor to fulfil this role, which could be expressed in different media, such as nomenclature, coins, statues and buildings, and literature. A literary account of what exactly was expected of the emperor as military leader is provided by Tacitus' contemporary Pliny the Younger. From his image of Trajan in the *Panegyricus* we get a glimpse of the ideal military leader: he loves peace (Plin. *Pan.* 16.1) but terrifies enemies (Plin. *Pan.* 12.1) and is victorious in bloody battles (Plin. *Pan.* 12.1); he is modest about his success and does not care too much for triumphs (Plin. *Pan.* 16.1). He is admired by his own men (Plin. *Pan.* 13.1) and behaves like a fellow soldier (Plin. *Pan.* 13.1; 15.5), but also guides the troops and knows what they need (Plin. *Pan.* 13.2–3), while preserving the discipline of the army (Plin. *Pan.* 18.1).[1]

Just as Pliny's *Panegyricus* participates in the discourse on Trajan's military virtues, panegyrical literature on Nero and Domitian is part of the corresponding discourses on them and reflects their historical forms of representation in the military sphere. The historical Nero and Domitian provide us with two very different ways to incorporate military actions in imperial representation.[2] Nero never set much emphasis on military achievements during his reign. Accord-

1 Pliny succeeds in depicting Trajan both as superior and equal to his soldiers, both as *imperator* and as *commilito* (cf. Rees 2001, 154–156). See also the description of Vespasian as a model for military leadership in this sense in Tac. *Hist.* 2.5.1: *Vespasianus acer militiae anteire agmen, locum castris capere, noctu diuque consilio ac, si res posceret, manu hostibus obniti, cibo fortuito, veste habituque vix a gregario milite discrepans* ("Vespasian, who was passionate on campaigns, headed the army on the march, chose the camping-ground, opposed the enemies by night or day through his planning, and, if need be, the sword. He ate what he could get, and dressed almost like a common soldier").

2 See the comparison of Nero's and Domitian's military *virtus* in their imperial representation in Bönisch-Meyer et al. 2014a, 439–442.

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ingly, panegyrical literature praises his time as an era of peace.[3] And military virtue is presented as outdated in the contemporary *Laus Pisonis*.[4] The Flavian Domitian, by contrast, made military success, especially against the German tribes, the most important element of his imperial representation, which is reflected for example in his coins and their legends, as well as in his use of the innovative title *Germanicus*.[5] Lots of literary accounts, especially Martial's books 7 and 8, but also Silius Italicus, Statius, Quintilian, and Frontinus, praise his military actions and triumphs, as well as building endeavours such as the *equus Domitiani* that express his military virtues.[6] These different ways of representing Nero's and Domitian's military actions as positive or neutral call for different strategies of deconstruction in the critical discourse: Nero's relatively rare military actions are not interpreted positively as signs of a peaceful era, as is done in the panegyrical discourse, but are re-coded as inactivity; Domitian's military endeavours are re-coded as fake success without real achievements.

Given that imperial historiography in general did not consider peace to be a desirable good per se, it would have been a possible strategy for Tacitus to pick up Neronian panegyrics and to criticize Nero's times as too peaceful.[7]

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3 Cf. p.88–91 on the motif of the *aurea aetas* in Neronian literature. The second *Carmen Einsidlense*, however, puts some emphasis on the military aspect, or on the peace following war, probably reacting to events in Britain. It describes Nero as Apollo ruling over the world (*iam regnat Apollo*, *Carm. Einsidl.* 2.38), and hence as comparable to the Olympians (see Schubert 1998, 418).

4 See *Laus Pisonis* 22–25 with Rilinger 1996, 142–143.

5 The Flavians legitimated their dynasty by military success and added *imperator* to the nomenclature of the *princeps* (see Leberl 2004, 49). See Seelentag 2004, 116–121 and Witschel 2006, 103; 114–115 for military elements in Domitian's imperial representation. The coins associate Domitian with *Victoria* (see Leberl 2004, 46; cf. Leberl 2004, 45–46 on the Cancelleria Relief with a personification of *Victoria*) and depict him as invincible (see Leberl 2004, 72). Domitian triumphed over the Chatti in 83 CE and 89 CE and had coins minted with the legend *Germanicus* (in 83 CE) and *Germania capta* (in 84 CE), cf. Lund 1988, 209. For the title *Germanicus* see also Leberl 2004, 48, and e.g. Mart. 2.2 and 5.2.7.

6 Domitian's military conduct in the year 70 CE is depicted positively by Flavius Josephus as surpassing his age and befitting his father (Joseph. *BJ* 7.85–88; see also 4.646; 654). On panegyrical literature about Domitian's martial conduct (including Frontinus' *Strategemata*) cf. Charles 2002, 29–30: Frontinus started to criticize Domitian only after his death in his work *De aquae ductu urbis Romae*. See also Leberl 2004, 143–167; 245–265. For the *equus Domitiani* see Seelentag 2004, 338–341; Leberl 2004, 37. Statius gives us a literary account of it (Stat. *Silv.* 1.1), and Martial (8.44.7) may refer to it too.

7 War offered opportunities to achieve honours for soldiers, generals, *principes*, and Rome itself. It was also an established idea in Roman historiography that foreign enemies keep internal morals to a higher standard (cf. Sall. *Cat.* 10 on the fall of Carthage and its negative effect on society as a watershed for Roman history). Peace could therefore generally be regarded as having negative effects on Roman power and virtues. For suspicions about peace

But Tacitus does not depict Nero's times as completely without war. There are longer military episodes about events in Germany (*Ann.* 13.53–57), in Britain (*Ann.* 14.29–39), and in Parthia and Armenia (*Ann.* 13.6–9; 13.34–41; 14.23–26; 15.1–17; 15.24–31). In these passages, Nero is rarely mentioned, let alone described as taking actions in war. It was, of course, common practice for an emperor to have his generals lead wars without being present himself at the site of the wars. But in that case an emperor could still be included in the narrative, as reflecting on the situation or giving orders and influencing the events from afar. Tiberius, for example, is present in the account of Germanicus' campaigns: he is not physically present at the front, but Tacitus describes his thoughts about the events (e.g. *id Tiberii animum altius penetravit, Ann.* 1.69.3). It does not strike the reader as odd when victory is awarded to Tiberius (*Ann.* 2.18). Even Claudius is mentioned, although less often than in the case of Tiberius, when campaigns during his reign are described (e.g. *Ann.* 11.19.3; 12.54.4). In comparison with Tiberius and Claudius, Nero's absence in the text stands out.

The three passages on Germany, Britain, and Parthia and Armenia just mentioned illustrate this in different ways. I will discuss them one by one. To start with the section on the events in Germany (*Ann.* 13.53–57), it begins by drawing attention to the actual leaders of the war and not to Nero: the situation is described as quiet—because of the abilities of the commanders (*ingenio ducum, Ann.* 13.53.1). In the whole section, Nero himself is mentioned only twice, and both instances associate him with an unmilitary feature. The first instance refers to Nero's fear: the legate of Belgica, Aelius Gracilis, makes use of Nero's fear as an argument against further military actions in Gaul planned by the commander Lucius Vetus (*Ann.* 13.53.3). In the second mention of Nero he is shown—not at war, but at the theatre in Rome (*Ann.* 13.54.1–4). A lively and sympathetic anecdote about Nero's encounter with two Germans, to whom he grants citizenship, contrasts sharply with his ensuing military action, a punishment for the disobedience of the Frisians, which is expressed briefly and drily by Tacitus (*Ann.* 13.54.4).[8] The sympathy of the reader is guided more towards the foreign tribes than to Nero.[9]

in general cf. *Ann.* 14.39.3: peace can be used as an honourable word for an inactive, idle life (*honestum pacis nomen segni otio imposuit*); for negative effects of peace on soldiers cf. *Ann.* 13.35.1. War is furthermore an important source for the historian's depiction: among the reasons why his account of Tiberius is allegedly restricted and without glory Tacitus mentions "peace unbroken or only weakly challenged" (*immota quippe aut modice lacessita pax*) and "an emperor who is not interested in expanding the Empire" (*princeps proferendi imperi incuriosus*) (*Ann.* 4.32.2).

8 Cf. Koestermann 1967, 341.

9 Cf. p.106–107.

Nero is also depicted as almost unconnected with the events in Britain (*Ann.* 14.29–39). He is mentioned at the beginning as profiteering from the testament of the adulatory commander Veranius (*Ann.* 14.29.1) and that of King Prasutagus, who hoped to save his throne and his family by making Nero his heir (*Ann.* 14.31.1). Then Nero disappears from the text until he is mentioned again at the end of the passage: after the glorious Roman victory he increases the strength of the army (*Ann.* 14.38.1), and he finally sends his freedman Polyclitus to review the situation in Britain (*Ann.* 14.39.1). But the Britons, so Tacitus, regard Polyclitus as a joke (*hostibus inrisui fuit*, *Ann.* 14.39.2). With the spirit of freedom still burning and not knowing the power of the freedmen, Tacitus' Britons are amazed that a commander and an army that had brought such a great war to an end should obey slaves (*servitiis oboedirent*, *Ann.* 14.39.2). In this section on military events in Britain, not only is Nero's participation in the events indirect, but his action of sending a freedman to Britain results in derision and so builds a stark contrast to the victory, which is depicted without mentioning Nero at all (*Ann.* 14.37).

The description of events in Parthia and Armenia (*Ann.* 13.6–9; 13.34–41; 14.23–26; 15.1–17; 15.24–31)[10] is characterized by the contrast between Nero and Corbulo. In the first of five sections dealing with the topic (*Ann.* 13.6–9), Nero is shown as relatively active and responsible, and as appreciative of the success of his generals (*Ann.* 13.7.1; 13.9.3). However, his most welcome deed seems to be the appointment of the general Corbulo to secure Armenia (*Ann.* 13.8.1). Corbulo's description as a virtuous, active, successful military commander (e.g. *Ann.* 13.8.3) prepares for the contrast between him and Nero that dominates the following passages on Parthia and Armenia. In the next section (*Ann.* 13.34–41), which deals with the conquest of Armenia by Corbulo, the general is depicted as an active military leader in full command and control of the situation.[11] The success that results in the destruction of Artaxata is presented as Corbulo's. When finally Nero is hailed *imperator* because of this success (*ob haec*, *Ann.* 13.41.4) the contrast between Corbulo's active military success and Nero's receiving the honours for it, is felt deeply. The honours attributed to him thus seem more surprising and misplaced than in the case of Tiberius, since the reader has almost been led to forget Nero in the preceding passages on events

10 For the chronological (re-)arrangement of Tacitus' account in these five passages see Syme 1958, 391–392. His summary of "Armenian affairs under Nero" nicely mirrors Tacitus' text: the focus is on Corbulo, the emperor is not mentioned.

11 Nero is mentioned only briefly at the beginning, as consul of the year 58 (*Ann.* 13.34.1), and in the middle, when Corbulo advises Tiridates to turn to Nero with his requests (*Ann.* 13.37.5).

in Parthia. That Nero's honours exceed what is appropriate is not only implicitly suggested, but is underlined by having Gaius Cassius declare that a whole year would not suffice to offer to the gods all the prayers that had been decreed (*Ann.* 13.41.4).

The third section on Parthia and Armenia (*Ann.* 14.23–26) depicts the end of military operations and Corbulo's taking up the governorship in Syria. Again, Corbulo is the active and successful commander. Nero is only mentioned in the context of the Hyrcanians, who send representatives to him with a petition for an alliance (*Ann.* 14.25.2), and at the appearance of Tigranes, which changes the Roman politics in this area: Tigranes had been chosen by Nero to take charge of the realm (*Tigranes a Nerone ad capessendum imperium delectus*, *Ann.* 14.26.1). This decision of Nero will turn out to be unfortunate (cf. *Ann.* 15.1–6). So, in the whole section, the reader is presented with only one decision by Nero, and this is a bad one. The narrative on Parthia and Armenia is picked up in a fourth section (*Ann.* 15.1–17), when Nero's choice of Tigranes as new king of Armenia has caused new problems. In the long account that follows, Nero is mentioned only in the context of embassies or letters and reports (*Ann.* 15.3.1; 15.5.4; 15.8.2; 15.14.3; 15.16.2; 15.17.2): this gives him a presence in the text that points to his absence from the site of the war. When the focus switches to Nero in Rome, it shows the setting up of victory trophies and arches although the war is still ongoing (*Ann.* 15.18.1) and we see Nero at pains to conceal his worries about these foreign events (*Ann.* 15.18.2).[12] The end of these Parthian affairs is reported shortly later in a fifth passage (*Ann.* 15.24–31) with the acceptance of Tiridates as king of Armenia. Nero is first depicted as active in consulting the leading men of Rome on whether they prefer a dangerous war or a dishonourable peace: *consuluit inter primores civitatis Nero, bellum anceps an pax inhonesta placeret* (*Ann.* 15.25.2). When the decision is presented in the next sentence, the grammar changes, and Nero disappears as active grammatical subject. The decision, made by the group, is formulated in passive voice: *nec dubitatum de bello* (*Ann.* 15.25.2). The next decision, about who should lead this war, is easily made. Corbulo is again chosen for the task. After that, Nero is mentioned only as dealing with Paetus after his return to Rome (*Ann.* 15.25.4), in the form of his portraits (*Ann.* 15.29.1–2; cf. *Ann.* 15.24.2), and in relation to a letter written to him by Tiridates (*Ann.* 15.30.2). When Nero is mentioned in the text, he does not appear as a successful military leader or as capable of military decisions. The text points rather to Nero's absence and passivity.

12 On this passage see also p.113; 127.

Looking at these passages on foreign military campaigns in the *Annals* together (*Ann.* 13.53–57 on Germany; *Ann.* 14.29–39 on Britain; *Ann.* 13.6–9; 13.34–41; 14.23–26; 15.1–17; 15.24–31 on Parthia/Armenia) we can say in summary that they include only rare references to Nero. His commanders are depicted as active military leaders, mostly in control of the situation and successful. When Nero's behaviour in Rome is shown, we see him at the theatre or allowing victory trophies to be erected without a victory. References to him, aside from mentioning embassies, letters, and the like, are to his fear and his profit from testaments and inheritances. There are few instances in which he really plays an active part, and these actions either have a bad outcome, when the freedman he sends to Britain causes derision and when the appointment of Tigranes as Armenian king leads to more problems, or they are decisions that delegate the real responsibility to Corbulo.

In the *Annals*, Nero's absence from war is underlined in the text by two further literary devices. First, the plausibility of his absence from the front and his lack of interest in military matters is supported by his depiction as young and dependent (*Ann.* 13.6), and as having a character that is just the opposite of what a successful soldier or general would require. Second, when Nero is in fact described as a military leader, or by language that usually depicts military leaders, this is most often embedded in a negative context and used to his disadvantage. So, thanks to Nero, Tacitus states, Rome has become a conquered city (*in modum captivitatis nox agebatur*, *Ann.* 13.25.2). Tacitus' Nero is victor—but over his own people, a people of slaves (*publici servitii victor*, *Ann.* 14.13.2). Soldiers are often associated with games, a context of representation that interests Nero much more than military matters, as when Tacitus' Nero has to reverse his decision to withdraw soldiers from the games (*Ann.* 13.24.1; 13.25.4), and when the Praetorians guard Nero's *Iuvenalia* (*accesserat cohors militum*, *Ann.* 14.15.4).[13]

A different strategy of coding Nero's inactivity and invisibility in military matters is applied in the *Agricola*. In the famous 'archaeology' of Britain (*Agr.* 13.1–17.2) Nero's name is simply left out: after *divus Iulius* (*Agr.* 13.1), *divus Augustus*, Tiberius, Gaius Caesar (*Agr.* 13.2), and *divus Claudius* (*Agr.* 13.3), Nero is not mentioned by name, while his commanders are, such as Suetonius Paulinus (*Agr.* 14.3–16.3), who is also the subject of the sentence in *Agr.* 14.3. By contrast, although Vespasian, as legate of Claudius, is depicted as responsible for the victory, Claudius, his emperor, is mentioned (*Agr.* 13.3). In its history of military

13 Cf. Edwards 1994, 90: "Nero's only use for soldiers was as an audience for his theatrical performances".

conquest in Britain, the *Agricola* enacts a sort of *damnatio memoriae* on Nero. His name is mentioned in other, negative contexts in the *Agricola*, namely with reference to his reign, in which it was wise to be passive (*Agr.* 6), to his temple-robbing (*Agr.* 6), and in a comparison with the other 'tyrant' Domitian (*Agr.* 45.2).

We could pointedly state that, while Nero appears just not interested in traditional military representation, the Tacitean Domitian appears too interested in it. Although the account of Domitian's own reign in the *Histories* is lost, we can observe some strategies of deconstructing his military image in the *Agricola* and in the early books of the *Histories*. In the *Histories*, the young Domitian is depicted as not taking part in the fighting (*Hist.* 3.74.1; 4.85.2) and as timid (*Hist.* 3.59.3; *postquam nihil hostile metuebatur*, *Hist.* 3.86.3), as indulging in licentious behaviour (*et Domitiani indomitae libidines timebantur*, *Hist.* 4.68.1),[14] as libidinous and bold (*Hist.* 4.39.2), as someone who needs to be controlled,[15] and as capable of dissimulation.[16] In the *Agricola*, the emperor Domitian holds that the virtue of being a good military leader belongs to the emperor alone (*ducis boni imperatoriam virtutem esse*, *Agr.* 39.2). Here Domitian is said to dread most of all that a private individual might steal any military glory from him. And it is presented as his thought, in the narrative mode of focalization, rather than as explanation by the narrator, that if that should happen he would have in vain silenced the processes of law (*studia fori*) and distinction in civilian professions (*civilium artium decus*) (*Agr.* 39.2). The focalization of Domitian here adds to the plausibility of the account given by Tacitus. Taking these text passages from the *Agricola* and the *Histories* together, the Tacitean Domitian emerges as an autocratic hypocrite who is anxious to present himself as victorious and who envies the military success of others.

This tension between what Tacitus' Domitian wants and what he is able to do, makes him stage fake triumphs. His arts of hypocrisy and simulation

14 Cf. *Hist.* 4.2.1: *nondum ad curas intentus, sed stupris et adulteriis filium principis agebat* ("he did not yet busy himself with the management of state affairs, but played the role of the emperor's son by devoting himself to rape and adultery").

15 Cf. *Hist.* 4.51.2: *Vespasianus … adversam de Domitiano famam accipit, tamquam terminos aetatis et concessa filio egrederetur* ("Vespasian received an unfavourable report of Domitian, who seemed to be transgressing the boundaries of his young age and the concessions allowed to a son"). See also *Hist.* 4.68.3 about Mucianus' conduct towards Domitian (*hic moras nectens, quis flagrantem retineret*).

16 Cf. *Hist.* 4.86.2: *simplicitatis ac modestiae imagine in altitudinem conditus studiumque litterarum et amorem carminum simulans* ("he hid his thoughts from scrutiny beneath an appearance of simplicity and modesty, feigning an interest in literature and a passion for poetry").

are prominently to the fore in the epilogue of the *Agricola* (39–46).[17] Like Tacitus' contemporary and friend Pliny (Plin. *Pan.* 11.4; 16.1–3; 17.4) and like Cassius Dio (67.4.1, referring to 83 CE; 67.7.4, probably referring to 89 CE), Tacitus reproaches Domitian for celebrating victories that were in fact no victories at all (*Agr.* 39.1).[18] The authors mentioned may not agree on which triumph exactly was supposed to be the fake triumph, but they agree on the strategy of deconstruction, namely to accuse Domitian of hypocrisy. Further, the *Germania* reflects indirectly on Domitian's alleged fake triumph over the Chatti, when Tacitus says sarcastically that Germania has been getting defeated for quite some time already (*tam diu Germania vincitur*,[19] *Germ.* 37.2) and that in recent times German tribes were the object of triumphs rather than of victories (*nam proximis temporibus triumphati magis quam victi sunt*, *Germ.* 37.5).[20]

Claiming that Domitian's military achievements were fake or non-existent can be considered a strategy of critical discourse that reacts to the opposite strategy in panegyrical discourse: positive accounts of Domitian's military endeavours aim to show that his representations are (at the least) appropriate and match his success, and so legitimize the vast size of triumphal arches and statues, for example. Critical historiography makes the triumphs Domitian celebrated appear vain, while panegyrical poetry presents 'triumphal' events as bigger than they were. We can see this panegyrical strategy of exaggeration in Martial's epigrams on Domitian's *adventus* after the Second Pannonian War.[21] The historical Domitian had unexpectedly declined a triumph in 93 CE. Martial compensates for this lack of a triumph in his epigrams, for example by describing Domitian's *adventus* in Rome in terms similar to a triumph (Mart. 8.8; 8.11; 8.21; 8.65) and by depicting hyperbolically the events at

17 See also p. 115–119 on character depiction as device of deconstruction.

18 This accusation probably refers to the triumph of 83 CE, which was received positively in contemporary literature. For positive depictions of Domitian during the campaign see Frontin. *Str.* 2.11.7; 2.3.23. For the historical background see Seelentag 2004, 116–119.

19 Cf. the structure of the opening sentence of Agricola's speech before the battle at Mons Graupius: *septimus annus est, commilitones, ex quo … Britanniam vicistis* ("it is now the seventh year since you conquered Britain", *Agr.* 33.2). The different use of the tenses (*vincitur* vs. *vicistis*) nicely brings out the sense: Tacitus' Agricola considers Britannia to have been truly defeated, but Tacitus claims that Germania is still being defeated.

20 This passage can be read as an exhortation addressed to Trajan to take action against the German tribes. For the historical background see Perl 1990, 229: Nerva and Trajan also took the name *Germanicus* at the end of 97, "vom Kaiser Trajan erwartete er [sc. Tacitus] nunmehr Taten".

21 For these poems see Schöffel 2002, 191–192, on whose analysis my summary draws.

the site of the war (Mart. 8.2; 8.11). The last epigram of this series (Mart. 8.65) presents a description of the triumphal buildings, the temple of Fortuna Redux, and a triumphal arch or gate (*arcus*, *porta*).[22] The triumphal gate is explicitly praised as worthy of Domitian's triumphs and, to enhance the panegyrical effect, he is called *Germanicus* here: *haec est digna tuis, Germanice, porta triumphis* (Mart. 8.65.11). What was in fact only an *ovatio* and not a triumph thus appears equal to a triumph, at least in the panegyrical text. In panegyrical discourse the textual representation of a 'fact' (Domitian's successful campaign) enlarges the actual 'fact'. Historiographical discourse picks up this hyperbolic mode of speaking and turns it against itself by claiming of other instances, too, that the 'fact' behind a form of representation was much smaller or even nonexistent.[23]

1.2 *Comparing 'Tyrants': The Successful Other*

We have already seen that the comparison of an emperor who is not a proper military leader with someone who is, helps to underline the emperor's inadequacy. This kind of comparison is a standard pattern of deconstruction. It can be considered the opposite of the panegyrical strategy that shows an emperor as superior to other military leaders, for example to Alexander and Caesar (e.g. Stat. *Silv*. 1.1.84–90 on Domitian's equestrian statue), but also, in Domitian's case, to Vespasian and Titus (Mart. 2.2.5–6).

Nero's successful and capable counterpart is Corbulo, whose character is introduced as the opposite of Nero's character right from the start (*Ann*. 13.8.1; 13.8.3; 13.9.2) and as extremely powerful, even as powerful as Pompey (*Ann*. 15.25.3).[24] But the most obvious contrast between an emperor and his commander is the one between Domitian and Agricola in the *Agricola*. Domitian is not mentioned in the military sections in the middle of the work, where the focus is entirely on Agricola. Just as Corbulo is the counterpart of Nero, Agricola is the antagonist of Domitian. He provides a guide for ideal conduct as military leader: he gains early experience (*Agr*. 5.1), is a role model for his fellow soldiers

22 See Schöffel 2002, 542–543; Cordes 2017, 88–91. The triumphal arch does not belong to the *ovatio* of 93 CE, precisely because it was not a triumph, but is included here by Martial to enhance this 'minor triumph'.

23 The same strategy is applied by Pliny with regard to triumphal arches, imperial titles, and the renaming of the months after the emperors. The emperors are said to have been happy about it, although they did not deserve it: *quasi meruissent laetabantur* (Plin. *Pan*. 54.4).

24 For characters contrasting with Nero in the *Annals*, especially his victims in their death scenes, see Keitel 2009. For the contrast of two characters or two situations as a means to give unity to the work see Devillers 1994, 169–179.

(*Agr.* 18.2), and a provincial governor who is able to control himself and practises what he preaches (*Agr.* 19.2); he does not usurp others' glory (*Agr.* 22.4), and no one need fear his silence (*Agr.* 22.4).

What is more, the figure of Agricola serves as a link between the two emperors. As Agricola was on military campaign in Britain already under Nero, as a figure he invites the reader to compare Nero and Domitian. While the focus of the work is on Agricola's conduct during Domitian's reign, we also learn about Agricola under Nero, whose times are characterized in similar terms to Domitian's era as dangerous times for military glory, distinction, and a great reputation: *militaris gloriae cupido, ingrata temporibus quibus sinistra erga eminentes interpretatio nec minus periculum ex magna fama quam ex mala* (*Agr.* 5.3). This may be an allusion to Nero's general Corbulo, whose relationship with his emperor as depicted in the *Annals* has some structural similarities to Agricola's relationship with his emperor Domitian: they both show true imperial virtues, military qualities above all, and loyal and modest behaviour towards an emperor who is depicted in each case as tyrannical and incapable of military commands or success.[25] Under Nero, Agricola consequently adapts his behaviour. He reveals a correct estimation and understanding of Nero's reign: he decides to spend the year between his quaestorship and the tribunate of the *plebs*, as well as his actual year as tribune, in quiet inactivity, which Tacitus evaluates as wise: *mox inter quaesturam ac tribunatum plebis atque ipsum etiam tribunatus annum quiete et otio transiit, gnarus sub Nerone temporum, quibus inertia pro sapientia fuit* (*Agr.* 6.3).

2 Building Endeavours: From Construction to Destruction

2.1 *Materiality and Textuality*

Both the historical Nero and the historical Domitian were prolific constructors in and of Rome. In the following discussion, I understand building endeavours and buildings in a broad sense as including monuments and statues. To mention only the most important examples, Nero's building endeavours include his

25 Already Tiberius, although not unqualified to be a military leader like Nero and Domitian, is constantly compared to Germanicus, the ideal commander (see e.g. *Ann.* 2.72–73 for the high estimation of Germanicus in general). Like Agricola and Corbulo, Germanicus is extremely cautious and modest towards his emperor about his successes (*Ann.* 2.22.1). For Germanicus as active military leader see for example *Ann.* 2.17; 2.20; see also his triumph in *Ann.* 2.41. Like Agricola facing Domitian, Germanicus confirms his support for and loyalty to Tiberius as he gets more successful (*Ann.* 1.34.1).

unfinished new palace, called the Golden House (*domus aurea*), his colossus,[26] and the project of the Corinth canal.[27] There are no *encomia* on the colossus of Nero or his *domus aurea*, but Calpurnius Siculus praises Nero's contemporary Rome and his amphitheatre (*Ecl.* 7).[28]

On Domitian's building activities more panegyrical literature has come down to us. Among his constructions, his palace (Mart. 7.56; 8.36; 8.39; Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.18–37) and his equestrian statue (Stat. *Silv.* 1.1) on the Forum stand out.[29] Panegyrical literature praises these monuments for their colossal size,[30] their luxury,[31] and their expression of the emperor's sublime or divine personality[32] and care for his people.[33] In general, Nero and Domitian are depicted as rebuilders and renewers of Rome.[34] It is important to underline that Nero's and Domitian's buildings are presented extremely positively in contemporary panegyrical discourse.[35] Nero's and Domitian's buildings are coded as negative

26 For Nero's colossus in panegyrical literature see Cordes 2017, 73–75.

27 For the Corinth canal see Alcock 1994, 102–103. See Ps.-Lucian *Nero* 1 for a positive evaluation of this Neronian project.

28 See Cordes 2017, 63–67.

29 For Domitian's palace on the Palatine and its representation of imperial power see Zanker 2004, 97 (arguing that the panegyrical representations of Domitian's palace mirrored the *princeps*' own intended representation); Witschel 2006, 103. An overview of Domitian's building activities is provided by Darwall-Smith 1996, 101–252.

30 See e.g. the size of Nero's amphitheatre in Calp. *Ecl.* 7.23–24 (*vidimus in caelum trabibus spectacula textis / surgere, Tarpeium prope despectantia culmen*, "I saw a theatre that rose to the sky on interwoven beams and almost looked down on the Capitoline summit") and of Domitian's palace in Mart. 8.36.5–12, which is said to reach to the stars and to be smaller only than Domitian himself (*haec, Auguste, tamen, quae vertice sidera pulsat, / par domus est caelo sed minor est domino*, Mart. 8.36.11–12).

31 See e.g. Calp. *Ecl.* 7.41 on *tantas … opes* of Neronian buildings and Mart. 9.3 praising the costs of Domitian's temples.

32 Closely intertwined is the depiction of Domitian himself and his statue in Stat. *Silv.* 1.1 (see Leberl 2004, 143). His palace buildings are associated with claims to divinity, see Leberl 2004, 54 and Cordes 2017, 86–87 on Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.18–26.

33 See Newlands 2002, 284–325; Nauta 2002, 388–391; Lorenz 2002, 200; Leberl 2004, 199–215; Rühl 2006, 321–328.

34 See Calp. *Ecl.* 7.43–44 (*en ego iam tremulus et vertice canus et ista / factus in urbe senex stupeo tamen omnia certe*), in which a man who has become old in Rome is stunned by everything new in the city. Martial praises Domitian's buildings, for example, by saying that Rome threw off its ancient senility and took on the traits of its ruler itself (*taliter exuta est veterem nova Roma senectam / et sumpsit vultus praesidis ipsa sui*, Mart. 5.7.3–4), and that only Domitian has turned what was recently a huge tavern into Rome (*nunc Roma est, nuper magna taberna fuit*, Mart. 7.61.10).

35 Cf. Elsner 1994, 123 on the lack of surviving panegyrical literature on Nero's buildings: "no positive account of his works has been allowed to survive, although there must have been some". There is, however, as already mentioned, Calp. *Ecl.* 7 (on the dating see p.39).

and deconstructed only after their deaths. This negative attitude towards the two emperors has rightly been interpreted not as the reason for their fall, but the result of it.[36]

Compared to their prominence in the city and in panegyrical discourse, building endeavours are mentioned relatively rarely in Tacitus.[37] With some buildings, criticism may have been difficult since the successors of Nero and Domitian continued to use them.[38] The lack of references may additionally be due, again, to the state of the surviving texts: the account of Nero's reign in the *Annals* is not complete, and the books on Domitian in the *Histories* are lost. However, there are two other reasons for this lack of discussion of imperial buildings, which pertain to their ontological status. First, it is more difficult for a text to control the interpretation of a material object, especially if it still exists, than of a performative act. People could go and compare their own impression of, for example, a triumphal arch with its description in a text, but a description of a triumph could not be checked. The act of a celebrated triumph was over once it was finished. A triumphal arch, by contrast, was an unchanging 'document' proving the emperor's victories to all its spectators. Buildings are the most 'manifest' medium of representation, potentially visible for everyone and more durable than performances, "a requisite for eternal fame".[39]

Second, imperial buildings are, like historiography, media of cultural memory.[40] There is a certain rivalry between these two media, on which the medium of the text reflects: building activities are explicitly termed as not important enough for historiography and as suitable topics rather for the daily news (*Ann.* 13.31.1). Furthermore, the texts claim to be better able to show virtues and criticize vices than material media of memory, for example statues. They consider material remains and the material production of memory to be less valuable than textual remains and virtues.[41] For example, Tacitus, in his panegyrical

36 See Elsner 1994, 123; Garthwaite 2009, 423–424.

37 Cf. Rouveret 1991, 3953 on "le nombre relativement restreint des passages que l'historien consacre à des monuments, qu'il s'agisse d'architecture ou de sculptures".

38 The colossus of Nero was declared a statue of Sol by Vespasian, and Domitian's palace was called *aedes publicae* by Nerva, and so made a public building, cf. Darwall-Smith 1996, 214; Zanker 2004, 99; Cordes 2017, 101.

39 Charles 2002, 34 on the architectural achievement of Roman emperors. Even Lactantius (*De mort. pers.* 3.3: *multa mirabilia opera, … Capitolium aliaque nobilia monimenta*) acknowledges the building endeavours of the 'persecutor' Domitian, see Charles 2002, 34.

40 On the relationship of historiography and cultural memory see p.46–48.

41 This ties in with Tacitus' association of Germanicus with monuments, as analysed by Woodman 2015. The altogether positive figure of Germanicus does not identify himself on monuments erected by or for him (Woodman 2015, 268): "Yet, whereas the confident conformity of the monuments erected by, or in honour of, Germanicus is underlined by

biography of Agricola, claims that statues and *imagines* of people are weak and mortal, whereas the beauty of the soul (*forma mentis*) is eternal; it can be preserved and expressed only by one's own character (*moribus*), not by the material and artistry of another (*per alienam materiam et artem*) (Agr. 46.3).[42] This is illustrated in the *Annals* for example by the textual version of Germanicus' funeral, which contrasts with the historical performance. The latter, so Tacitus, had neither family portraits (material images of remembrance) nor a procession, but—as only the text points out and remembers—it was marked by remembrance of his virtues: *funus, sine imaginibus et pompa, per laudes ac memoriam virtutum eius celebre fuit* (*Ann.* 2.73.1).

2.2 *Nero's Buildings as Acts of Destruction and as Crossing Boundaries*

The surviving Tacitean texts do not suffice to analyse how the historiographer deconstructed Domitian's building endeavours. But as regards Nero, there is one important case in which buildings are deconstructed in other ways than by not mentioning them, namely the buildings erected after the Great Fire of Rome in 64 CE. Their presentation in the text differs enormously from the description of Tiberius' buildings after the fire of 36 CE (*Ann.* 6.45), to which it can be compared.[43] Tiberius turns the damage to his glory (*quod damnum Caesar ad gloriam vertit*): he covers the costs of the houses and apartment buildings affected, is parsimonious with his own buildings (*modicus privatis aedificationibus*), and builds or rebuilds only the temple of Augustus and the *scaena* of the theatre of Pompey on behalf of the state (*Ann.* 6.45.1).

By contrast, Tacitus' text presents Nero's buildings after the fire not as acts of construction, but rather as the reason for destruction. Although it is never explicitly said that Nero was certainly responsible for the fire, his buildings support this rumour, since Nero is described as taking advantage of the catastrophe: *ceterum Nero usus est patriae ruinis exstruxitque domum* (*Ann.* 15.42.1).[44] Since the reader has just learned that Nero seemed to be planning to found a new city that would carry his name (*Ann.* 15.40.2), the fire just seems too much of a coincidence: the text insinuates that the buildings were the reason

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the official-sounding language with which Tacitus describes them, the builder and honorand himself emerges from the text as a less certain figure, refusing to identify himself on his own structures and modelling himself on a succession of alternative characters to suit the needs of the moment."

42 Cf. a similar statement of Maecenas towards Augustus in Cass. Dio 52.35.3–5.

43 For other positive reactions to fire and the rebuilding endeavours of Tiberius see *Ann.* 2.49; 3.72; 4.64.

44 Cf. my interpretation of this *cui bono* argument and the whole passage on p.146–147.

for the fire, which is also presented as a result of Nero's crossing of boundaries (*Ann.* 15.38–45).[45] His buildings continue this practice: they cross financial, historical, natural, and political boundaries. The immense costs require funding that is achieved only by despoiling Italy, the provinces, the allies, free cities, and even the gods (*Ann.* 15.45.1–2). But, even so, this is not an adequate replacement for the buildings that were destroyed: Tacitus draws attention to their age and singularity, which the older contemporary generation still remembers but which could not be rebuilt (*quae reparari nequibant*, *Ann.* 15.41.1). In addition, there is criticism of the quality of the new buildings (*Ann.* 15.43.5). All this makes his Nero appear not an innovative builder but a destroyer of history. What is more, his buildings are not only against history, they are also against nature: Nero's architects have to use their audacity and skill against nature or to rival nature (*quibus ingenium et audacia erat etiam, quae natura denegavisset, per artem temptare et viribus principis inludere*, *Ann.* 15.42.1), and Nero himself is characterized as always longing for the incredible (*Nero tamen, ut erat incredibilium cupitor*, *Ann.* 15.42.2). His plan of a canal from Lake Avernus to Ostia is given as an example to prove this attitude and—with undue criticism[46] regarding the project—analysed as a failure.[47] Such depictions of building activities against nature contrast with panegyrical descriptions of imperial buildings as beneficially controlling and taming nature.[48]

Finally, Nero's building plans are presented as the opposite of his own programme announced at the beginning of his reign. When the *domus aurea* blurs the boundaries of private and official, this clearly contradicts Nero's earlier promise to keep his house and the state apart: *discretam domum et rem publicam* (*Ann.* 13.4.2). As mentioned above, there is no panegyrical record of the *domus aurea* and it is still disputed whether it was open or partly open to the public; but it was certainly planned as an extremely luxurious building.[49] Critical literature such as the *Octavia* can draw on that openness, define it as private (*limen armatae ducis / servent cohortes*, *Oct.* 625–626), and interpret it as a sign of Nero's private luxury.[50] Martial stresses its size (*unaque iam tota stabat in urbe domus*, *Spect.* 2.4) and associates it with the egoism of the tyrant (*invidiosa*

45 Cf. O'Gorman 2000, 171. See also p.125–126.

46 Cf. Koestermann 1968, 247–248 on the creative plan that underestimated the technical problems. On the lack of a good reason for Nero's plans in Tacitus see p.114.

47 The failure of Nero's project is taken up by Statius, who uses it as a contrast to Domitian's successful *via Domitiana*, which he praises (Stat. *Silv.* 4.3.4–8).

48 For this panegyrical motif see Gauly 2006, 459–461; 469 on Stat. *Silv.* 2.2.32–33; 52–58 and on the control of nature as the leitmotif of Roman architecture.

49 Cf. Witschel 2006, 102 with further references to the scholarly debate.

50 Cf. Cordes 2017, 34.

feri … atria regis, *Spect.* 2.3). Criticism like this is part of a discourse on the distinction of public and private luxury, in which the criticism is mainly criticism of private luxury.[51] By defining the *domus aurea* as private, it becomes legitimate to apply this kind of criticism. The same strategy is used by post-Domitianic literature: Martial claims that Domitian's private luxury (*superbi / regis delicias gravesque luxus*, Mart. 12.15.5–6) has become public after his death. Pliny deconstructs the positive image of Domitian's palace (*Pan.* 49–51) as presented in Stat. *Silv.* 4.2 (where luxury is positive, since connected to euergetism)[52] as *occultus luxus*, and praises Trajan, who is very modest in private buildings (*idem tam parcus in aedificando quam diligens in tuendo*, *Pan.* 51.1) but *magnificus* in public buildings (*Pan.* 51.3).[53]

3 Public Entertainment: From Popular to Eccentric Performances

3.1 *Spectacles, Games, and Feasts: The Banquet of Tigellinus*

While buildings are the most material forms of representation, (public) events organized by the emperor are transient in character. As noted above, people had only one chance to witness a performance in the theatre or the circus. Texts are always only reflections of ancient performances. The texts describe the performances in various ways. Both the historical Nero and the historical Domitian organized spectacles, games, and feasts, and introduced new forms of festival.[54] The panegyrical discourse presents these forms of public entertainment in a way that illustrates the emperors' virtues of *liberalitas* and *civilitas* and his popularity, as we have already seen in the case study on feasts in chapter 1: the emperors give generous presents and impressive shows; they make use of the social interaction and dialogue with all levels of society that is possible in the relaxed atmosphere of such events. Within and by means of public forms of entertainment, the panegyrical emperors address everyone appropriately and confirm social status. Their own position in this society may be presented as equal to the others or as sublimely—positively—distant. The critical

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51 For the tradition of moral critique of luxury see e.g. Cic. *Mur.* 76: *odit populus Romanus privatam luxuriam, publicam magnificentiam diligit.* Luxury in public can be seen as something positive (cf. Gauly 2006, 461); but the boundaries between public and private are not fixed (cf. Cordes 2017, 22).

52 Cf. Cordes 2017, 36–41.

53 Cf. Cordes 2017, 41–50 on Mart. 12.15 and Plin. *Pan.* 49–51.

54 For public entertainment provided by Nero and Domitian from a historical and panegyrical perspective see Hardie 2003; Leberl 2004, 181–215; 266–280; Heinemann 2014 (on founding Greek *agones*).

discourse presents a different image of imperial spectacles, games, and feasts, in particular those of eccentric emperors.[55] As we have seen in the example of imperial feasts in chapter 1, the historiographical discourse picks up several elements characterized as positive in panegyrical accounts, especially *civilitas* and *liberalitas*, and deconstructs them. Again, the surviving texts of Tacitus do not include information on Domitianic spectacles, but the *Histories* must have dealt with this topic (cf. *Ann.* 11.11.1–2).

In Tacitus, the emperor's *civilitas* is often depicted as confined to his attention to and appreciation by the people. Nero's entertaining the masses is closely connected to the idea of euergetism, which expected the *princeps* to provide benefits for his people. The historical Nero presented himself as a supporter of the *populus*,[56] and he was indeed popular with the people.[57] His organization of entertainment and his representation as artist are strongly connected to his close relationship with the people. The critical discourse reacts to this kind of imperial representation, which was aimed specifically at the people, in a similarly specific way. It does not deny this good relationship. The strategy used to deconstruct Nero's popularity is rather to show that this good relationship between emperor and *plebs* was a relationship among equally bad people. Descriptions of the people are mostly negative: the public is described as ever ready to believe the worst (*ut est vulgus ad deteriora promptum*, *Ann.* 15.64.2) and as judging emperors by their outward appearance.[58] The feature that the Tacitean Roman people share most prominently with their emperor is their desire for entertainment. This shared interest makes them sad about Nero's death (*plebs sordida et circo ac theatris sueta … maesti et rumorum avidi*, *Hist.* 1.4.3). The *plebs* is characterized by its eagerness for entertainment (*voluptatum cupido*, *Ann.* 15.36.4), and is happy about a *princeps* who feels the same (*ut est vulgus cupiens voluptatum et, si eodem princeps trahat, laetum*, *Ann.* 14.14.2). But

55 But not all references to imperial performances are coded negatively: Claudius' canal and *naumachia*, for example, are positive in *Ann.* 12.56–57. When Tacitus mentions Domitian's Saecular Games in order to refer to his own involvement in them (*Ann.* 11.11), this is also without criticism of the games.

56 E.g. Nero's coins minted after 59 CE indicate his merits in relation to the *populus*, see Witschel 2006, 112.

57 See Witschel 2006, 101–102 on Nero's popularity and on later intentions to discredit the people for that reason.

58 People are said to judge emperors by their looks e.g. in *Hist.* 1.7.4: *ipsa aetas Galbae inrisui ac fastidio erat adsuetis iuventae Neronis et imperatores forma ac decore corporis, ut est mos vulgi, comparantibus* ("Even Galba's age seemed comic and despicable to a populace that was used to the young Nero and compared emperors, as is the mob's custom, in point of looks and beauty").

this happiness is not innocent or blameless. It is accompanied by public outrage (*crederes laetari, ac fortasse laetabantur per incuriam publici flagitii, Ann.* 16.4.4).

To characterize the people in this way, historiographical discourse can also draw on a panegyrical text which is again taken up and interpreted in a new way: the *De clementia* also depicts the people negatively and points out that they therefore need a ruler and someone who guides them (Sen. *Clem.* 1.1.1).[59] Panegyrical discourse uses this characterization of the people to legitimize monarchy and to attribute an important role to the *princeps*, who has to control and guide the people. The same impression of the character of the people is created in historiographical discourse, but here it discredits both the people and the *princeps*. People need to be controlled, as the *De clementia* implies, but the *princeps*, who equals them in their licentiousness, is not able to take up this role.

The emperor's generosity (*liberalitas*) regarding spectacles and feasts can be re-coded as lavishness (*luxuria*).[60] Depicted as both profligate and aimed at the people, the eccentric performances depicted in the historiographical discourse do not mirror and confirm social status; they rather nullify it or turn it upside down.[61] In general, the very institution of games and spectacles can be discredited as morally low.[62] We can observe these mechanisms of recoding in Tacitus' version of the banquet organized for Nero by Tigellinus (*Ann.* 15.37.1–4), which has already been touched upon in chapter 1 and which will later provide examples of the narrative performance of gender and of ethnicity, the construction of an effective narrative time-sequence, and the importance of explicit exemplarity.[63] Tacitus' text has been used for reconstructions of its historical context, especially the Roman festival of the *Floralia*, and of Nero's purposes.[64] I instead regard reminiscences of the *Floralia* as a strategy of the text to point out

59 See Manuwald 2002, 114; Cordes 2017, 213–214.

60 Cf. p.21–22.

61 Cf. p.25–26.

62 See e.g. *Dial.* 29.3 for the *histrionalis favor et gladiatorum equorumque studia* as vices of the city.

63 Cf. 105–106; 125–126; 153. For Tigellinus' character and his role in influencing Nero see also his depiction in *Hist.* 1.72: being one of the worst people and full of moral flaws, cruelty, and greed himself, he misled Nero into every bad deed.

64 Allen 1962 for example points out the similarity of the description of this banquet with traditional Roman festivals that were characterized by licentious behaviour, especially the *Floralia*. See Allen 1962, 100: "Thus it may be that Tacitus is really reporting the emperor's personal interpretation of some public festival, possibly the Floralia, which were normally celebrated each year from April 28 through May 3."

the licentiousness of this banquet on a literary level. The banquet is introduced as one example of the banquets that Nero provided in public places and as an instance in which he treated the city as his own house (*totaque urbe quasi domo uti*, *Ann.* 15.37.1).[65] This expression flags up the first of Nero's boundary-crossings to the attentive reader, as we have already seen.[66] With his public banquets, the Tacitean Nero crosses a boundary he had set up himself.

The banquet of Tigellinus is introduced as one example of several events of this kind. Tacitus implies that there are other comparable instances of extremely lavish and famous banquets, which he does not want to deal with. A certain tension arises between this alleged normality of the banquet and its following description, which aims to bring out its extraordinary character, underlined already by the very rare word *prodigentia* (*Ann.* 15.37.1) referring to this lavishness—attested only in the *Annals* (cf. *Ann.* 6.14; 13.1.3). For Tacitus' Nero, the extraordinary has become normal. We then learn that the banquet takes place on Agrippa's lake. The description of the raft and vessels recalls another sophisticated ship construction (*fabricatus est ratem*, *Ann.* 15.37.2), namely the ship that was to kill Agrippina (*Ann.* 14.3.3; 14.5.1–2). Matricide thus enters the reading process of this passage. The details provided about the things, people, and animals involved then illustrate the crossing of boundaries of material, character, and space: the vessels are made of gold and ivory (*naves auro et ebore distinctae*); the oarsmen are boy-favourites, who are grouped according to their age and their sexual expertise (*remigesque exoleti per aetates et scientiam libidinum componebantur*); birds, wild animals, and sea animals were brought there from distant lands and all the way from the ocean (*volucres et feras diversis et terris at animalia maris Oceano abusque petiverat*) (*Ann.* 15.37.2). Additionally, the banquet breaches social norms when it provides brothels on one side of the lake's banks filled with honourable women (*lupanaria … inlustribus feminis completa*), on the other side naked prostitutes (*Ann.* 15.37.3). When the text focuses on Nero again (*ipse*, *Ann.* 15.37.4), it shows him crossing every moral boundary.[67]

3.2 *Staging Reality: Nero, Tacitus, and Theatre*

The historical Nero must have gained much favour and popularity especially through his performances on stage, as singer and actor, and also as charioteer

65 The description of Tigellinus' banquet is integrated into Nero's crossing of boundaries here and is an integral part of the degradation. It is therefore not, *pace* Woodman 1998, 171–172, "digressive".

66 See p.68–69.

67 For the series of transgressions depicted in the following see p.125–126.

and poet, both with the Roman *plebs* and the provincials in the Greek East.[68] As emperor he not only provided entertainment for his people, but was also an integral part of the entertainment himself. Nero was strongly identified with his role as artist.[69] While the contemporary media that were largely controlled by the emperor himself hinted at them indirectly,[70] some panegyrical texts (*Apocolocyntosis*, Lucan's *Laudes*, *Carmen Einsidlense* 1) focus on Nero's artistic endeavours: they make this very personal and individual element crucial to the representation of the *princeps* and more important than the traditional role.[71] The critical discourse reacts to this claim that the role of artist is suitable for the *princeps* and to the intertwining of theatre and stage with reality that this claim entails: Tacitus makes use of this entanglement of the artistic and the real in his work, and shows that the role of artist is an inappropriate and unsuccessful role for an emperor.[72] For Domitian the surviving Tacitean texts do not tell us anything about his behaviour in the theatre, but, as mentioned above, his triumph over the Germans is unmasked as a bogus triumph in the *Agricola* and so as a form of staging reality too (*falsum e Germania triumphum, Agr.* 39.1).

The historiographical criticism of the emperor as actor and singer[73] builds on the negative picture of the social status of actors: actors do not tell the truth; they pretend to be something they are not; their body has no dignity.[74] Acting is

68 See Witschel 2006, 101. Nero's forms of representation as artist were directed towards the Roman people and the Greek cities, not towards the Roman aristocracy, see Rilinger 1996, 132–133. For the historical Nero as artist see e.g. Manning 1975; Schmidt 1990; Rilinger 1996; Malitz 2004; Meier 2008 (arguing that the historical Nero really thought of himself as a serious artist); Gotter 2011.

69 This is nicely taken up in the discourse on the false Neros. One of them is said to have been so persuasive in his personification of Nero also because he played the lyre and knew how to sing: *libertinus ex Italia, citharae et cantus peritus, unde illi super similitudinem oris propior ad fallendum fides* (*Hist.* 2.8.1).

70 See Witschel 2006, 114.

71 For this branch of panegyrical discourse see Schubert 1998, 413–415.

72 The *locus classicus* for thinking of the *princeps* as a role to play is Suet. *Aug.* 99, reporting Augustus' alleged last words. See Chaniotis 1997, 219–221 for life-as-stage metaphors in Hellenistic thought.

73 Previous studies on Nero as artist which deal with the relationship of the depiction and the depicted have already pointed out that Tacitus makes use of specific language and imagery to recall tragedy and to achieve a dramatic effect, see Woodman 1993; Santoro L'Hoir 2006. I will not discuss Nero's roles as poet and charioteer in detail. For the Tacitean Nero as poet see *Ann.* 14.16.1 (Tacitus denies that Nero's poems possessed any good quality); see *Ann.* 13.3.3; 14.14.1; 15.44.5 on Nero as charioteer.

74 See Edwards 1994, 84, comparing the bodies of actors to those of gladiators and prostitutes: "They were paraded on stage for financial gain. They served the pleasures of others."

also conceived as the opposite of military actions or combat.[75] Being an actor is thus in stark contrast to the image of the ideal *princeps*, especially from a senatorial perspective.[76] When the Tacitean Nero takes his role as singer and actor so seriously (*Ann.* 14.15.4; 16.4), he breaches an important imperial social norm and argues implicitly that he is allowed this transgression.[77] However, his performances are not 'real': Nero virtually turns the show itself into a stage act when he has paid *Augustiani* in the audience make sure that he gets the right kind of applause (*Ann.* 14.15.5). And not even then is he successful as an artist. The silliness of Nero's behaviour is underlined by the description of the negative reaction Nero receives. Especially those from further away who are not used to the degeneracy in Rome cannot bear to watch Nero's performances. This contrasts sharply with the excitement expressed by Corydon, a foreigner to the city (*rustice*, *Ecl.* 7.40), about Nero's theatre in the panegyrical seventh eclogue of Calpurnius Siculus.[78] Tacitus' Nero, by contrast, not only forces people to stay, but also spies on their expressions of enthusiasm (*Ann.* 16.5.2).

What is more, Tacitus' Nero extends the inappropriateness of his stage performances to others: he not only performs himself, but also forces respectable people to appear on stage. Nero is shown as making use of people's poverty to force them on stage (*Ann.* 14.14.3). This form of representation is thus depicted as responsible for disgracing the aristocracy and nullifying social values.[79] The interest of the aristocracy in performing appears in Tacitus' text as merely staged by Nero. What the text tends to obscure is that acting was indeed a leisure activity and fashion among contemporary aristocrats.[80] Private performances, at least, were not considered disgraceful.[81] It would have done

On the low estimation of actors, dancers, gladiators, and charioteers (they are from the Greek East, slaves or former slaves, immoral, unnatural, and get paid) cf. Champlin 2003, 64.

75 See Edwards 1994, 86.

76 Cf. also Juvenal's criticism of Nero: he interprets Nero's performance activities as demeaning or prostituting himself: *haec opera atque hae sunt generosi principis artes, / gaudentis foedo peregrina ad pulpita cantu / prostitui Graiaeque apium meruisse coronae* ("These were the achievements and these the skills of our noble emperor, who took pleasure in prostituting himself on foreign stages with his horrid singing, and in winning Greek parsley crowns", Juv. 8.224–226).

77 See Edwards 1994, 87.

78 See p.108.

79 See also p.127–129.

80 Cf. Edwards 1994, 86 on Nero's own stage appearances as "in a sense, the culmination of a fashion rather than a peculiar aberration". See *Ann.* 15.65 on Piso as *tragoedus*; *Ann.* 16.21.1 on Thrasea Paetus singing *habitu tragico*.

81 See Edwards 1994, 88.

more justice to Nero had Tacitus described his performances as exaggerated and inappropriate, but as a form of a common practice of the time. This is what Juvenal claims in his critique of Nero. His eighth satire includes an attack on aristocrats who perform on stage or in gladiatorial combat, which is considered humiliating (Juv. 8.183–210). But Nero, who is only the worst example of the disgrace (Juv. 8.211–230), does not force them to do so (*nullo cogente Nerone*, Juv. 8.193). However, regarding the *Iuvenalia* Tacitus states openly that all kinds of people took part, evidently without being forced (*Ann.* 14.15.1).

These forms of deconstruction, which depict Tacitus' Nero as an inappropriate and unsuccessful performer, are supported by Tacitus' dramatic style, a literary technique that Tacitus applies throughout, but which makes a special point in the Neronian books of the *Annals*. Tacitus incorporates features of drama and tragedy in various ways. The structure and style attribute a very dramatic element to Tacitus' prose and augment its emotional effect.[82] People in the narrative sometimes behave like actors, and this in two different ways. Generally, most people make use of the technique of *simulatio*,[83] which means that they do not say and show what they really think or feel, but something else—which is typical of an actor. More specifically, people behave like they have taken up a role and are part of a theatrical play.[84] Or they reproach each other for acting, as does Agrippina, who calls Domitia's intrigue a theatre play (*quasi scaenae fabulae*, *Ann.* 13.21.3). When Nero burns Christians this is termed a *spectaculum* by the narrator and set on the same level as the *cir-*

82 For literary techniques in Tacitus resembling techniques in tragedy see Billerbeck 1991. For dramatic elements in the Nero books see Walker 1952, 43–44 (for dramatic elements as a narrative technique in Tacitus in general see Walker 1952, 35–49). For the story of Thrasea Paetus evolving in five acts see Heldmann 1991, 213–218.

83 On *simulatio* as a characteristic feature of communication depicted in the *Annals* see Schulz 2015, 169–173.

84 Woodman 1993 has analysed the dramatic structure of Tacitus' account of the Pisonian conspiracy and argues that the dramatic elements illuminate why the conspiracy would fail. He regards this account as a narrative unit and shows how the real and the dramatic are blended (Woodman 1993, 108). This concerns not only metaphors from acting, but also the role-playing of the people involved as described in the text. The conspirators propose to restage the murder of Caesar, only with Nero as victim (cf. Woodman 1993, 109). They take real life for drama (cf. Woodman 1993, 112). The conspirator Scaevinus, who gives the conspiracy away, is more concerned with playing a role than with reality (cf. Woodman 1993, 110–111). Faenius Rufus resembles a *miles gloriosus* (cf. Woodman 1993, 114). That there are no authorial directions by Tacitus about what he describes as being dramatic encourages "the reader's belief that the dramatic perception is the conspirators' own rather than the author's" (Woodman 1993, 120).

cense ludicrum that he stages too (*Ann.* 15.44). The language used by the narrator here supports uneasiness about the boundaries of dramatic life and real life.

The boundaries between the real world and the world of acting are, finally, blurred in Tacitus' version of the Saturnalia (*Ann.* 13.15), in which a play stages reality. The distinctive element of this festival is the role-reversal of masters and slaves. In Tacitus, Nero and his friends play a game in which Nero draws the lot for the role of king.[85] He thus, still in the game, orders Britannicus to sing a song. Britannicus, far from embarrassing himself, as Nero had hoped, alludes to his own situation, his removal from his father's home and from supreme power, and so gains much sympathy. This is the incentive for Nero to plan his murder. This complex situation illustrates that one cannot and must not distinguish between games and reality anymore: the Saturnalia provide no shelter for critical statements, as they should do.[86] The game of allotting roles only assigns the roles the participants play in reality. In a Hamlet-esque scene[87] the game speaks the truth more clearly than reality. And what is said in the game has direct consequences for reality. In the description of Nero's reign, theatre has become reality and reality has become theatre.

4 Nero's Speeches: Gaining Rhetorical Power

Another element of representation and form of communication that is performative is oratory. While the emperor mainly addressed the people through forms of public entertainment, speeches are primarily a medium of communication with senators or the upper classes and, in the form of an adhortative address before battle, with the soldiers.[88] Scholarly attention has until now focused on the idea of free speech in Tacitus (*libertas*) in the *Dialogus*, on oratory in the *Annals* and the *Histories*, and on the system of communication, especially as depicted in the *Annals*.[89] But speeches are also part of imperial representation and a rhetorical quality that is evaluated by the historiographical discourse. In analysing Nero's first two speeches in the *Annals* and the

85 Nero's very first appearance in Tacitus is also in the context of a game, the Game of Troy, cf. O'Gorman 2000, 168.
86 For the literary motif of playing on role-reversal during the Saturnalia see Hor. *Sat.* 2.7.
87 Cf. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* III,2.
88 For a successful speech of a military commander see e.g. the effect of Germanicus' speeches (*supplices ad haec et vera exprobrari fatentes*, *Ann.* 1.44.1; *orationem ducis secutus militum ardor*, *Ann.* 2.15.1).
89 See O'Gorman 2000; Schulz 2015.

speech by which he demonstrates rhetorical mastery at a crucial point in the narrative, we will see that Nero's rhetorical skills are related both to Seneca and to Nero's other 'intellectual' interests, such as performances on stage. These two relationships have certain implications for speeches as forms of imperial representation.

Nero's rhetorical debut is formed by his *laudatio* on Claudius and his first speech in the *curia* (*Ann.* 13.3–4). Tacitus' version of these speeches emphasizes three things:

(1) Nero's ideas as presented in these speeches are in accord with senatorial politics: his programme draws a clear line between his future reign and matters that had recently caused ill-will under Claudius (*ea maxime declinans, quorum recens flagrabat invidia*), and between his and the senate's functions (*teneret antiqua munia senatus*) (*Ann.* 13.4.2).

(2) The young Nero is rhetorically dependent on Seneca and is himself interested in other intellectual activities. Tacitus has the *seniores* in the senate compare Nero to his predecessors, who were all good, independent speakers (*adnotabant seniores, quibus otiosum est vetera et praesentia contendere, primum ex iis, qui rerum potiti essent, Neronem alienae facundiae eguisse*, *Ann.* 13.3.2): Nero is the first of the line to need the *facundia* of someone else. The Tacitean narrator seems to agree with his figures in the narrative when he further explains the seniors' opinion and characterizes Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius briefly as orators (*Ann.* 13.3.2). Without a clear syntactic connection he continues: *Nero puerilibus statim annis vividum animum in alia detorsit* (*Ann.* 13.3.3). Tacitus specifies Nero's other interests as engraving, painting, singing, and chariot-driving. This suggests a logical connection, which is not made explicit: Nero indulged in these activities, *in alia detorsit*, instead of pursuing rhetorical studies.

(3) Seneca may present senatorial ideals through Nero's mouth, but his style and intentions can be criticized.[90] The senators laugh during Nero's *laudatio* on Claudius when he talks about his *providentia* and *sapientia*, which was not planned by the ghostwriter Seneca, as the *quamquam* clearly indicates (*Ann.* 13.3.1).[91] The effect of Seneca's speech is not as intended. Also, Seneca's

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90 For criticism of Seneca's style see also Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.125–131.

91 The speech is hence different from the *Apocolocyntosis*, which aimed to provide laughter about Claudius, even if Tacitus is alluding to it (so Koestermann 1967, 238). Tacitus' Seneca, however, was not aiming at laughter. The most probable explanation seems to be that the Tacitean Nero did not deliver the speech the right way, that he perhaps even laughed himself (cf. *nemo risui temperare*, *Ann.* 13.3.1). Part of the reason for this wrong delivery may be that he had not written the speech himself (cf. O'Gorman 2000, 149 for the divergence of

speech is described as extremely refined, matching his talent, which not only charmed but was also adapted to the contemporary ear (*ut fuit illi viro ingenium amoenum et temporis eius auribus accommodatum*, *Ann.* 13.3.1). Seneca's own ideal of style seems to determine the character of imperial speeches. Later, Seneca is accused of putting speeches showing clemency into Nero's mouth either to attest to his own noble instructions or to showcase this talent: *clementiam suam obstringens crebris orationibus, quas Seneca testificando, quam honesta praeciperet, vel iactandi ingenii voce principis vulgabat* (*Ann.* 13.11.2).[92]

We can conclude that at the beginning of his reign, Tacitus' Nero is not rhetorically independent. It is Tacitus' Seneca who speaks through Nero, who also uses the speeches egoistically to demonstrate his own talent.[93] Nonetheless, Nero's behaviour is at first in accord with these pro-senatorial speeches (*nec defuit fides, multaque arbitrio senatus constituta sunt*, *Ann.* 13.5.1). But the apparent closeness between Nero and the senate is unmasked as really being a closeness between Seneca and the senate.[94] By this Tacitus is able to deconstruct the historical Nero's closeness to the senate, which was propagated in Neronian representations until 62/64 CE.[95]

After the death of Agrippina and Burrus, the *Annals* depict a change not only in the political, but also in the rhetorical situation. This change becomes apparent in Nero's speech declining Seneca's request to retire in 62 CE (*Ann.* 14.53–54). The *princeps* Nero answers Seneca's speech directly (*Ann.* 14.55–56). In this battle of words Nero emerges as a self-confident and independent orator.[96] He

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author and orator: "There is a strong sense that Nero's funeral oration is so Senecan that it could not possibly be mistaken for Nero's own voice.").

92 As Ker 2012, 319 points out, the *clementiam suam*, "his clemency", is ambiguous, "potentially referring to Seneca's rather than Nero's clemency or indeed to Seneca's *Clemency*". This ambiguity further illustrates how far Seneca intrudes into Nero's speech.

93 Cf. O'Gorman 2000, 149: "Nero does not speak, but is spoken through". This also involves criticism of Seneca, who "is laid open to the suspicion of insincerity by the suggestion of alternative motives for his composing speeches on moderation to be delivered by Nero" (Ryberg 1942, 401).

94 This closeness is itself later deconstructed when Seneca formulates Nero's official version of Agrippina's death for the senate (*Seneca adverso rumore erat, quod oratione tali confessionem scripsisset*, *Ann.* 14.11.3).

95 For the representation of Nero's politics in accord with the senate in official media before 62/64 CE see Witschel 2006, 111: Nero's coins up to the year 62 CE markedly showed Nero's good relationship with the senate and strikingly included the *ex S*(*enatus*) *C*(*onsulto*) also on precious metal coins.

96 Ker 2012, 322 compares the confrontation between the figures of Seneca and Nero in the *Octavia* (*Oct.* 435–592), in which Seneca's advice from *De clementia* is deconstructed by Nero too.

starts by saying that he can reply to Seneca's well-prepared speech with an impromptu speech, a skill Seneca has taught him and which he considers his teacher's first gift (*id primum tui muneris habeo*, *Ann.* 14.55.1).[97] We may wonder how exactly Nero had improved so much. His lack of rhetorical interest and skill was made plausible by his stronger interest in other arts in his youth (*Ann.* 13.3.3). As these interests are described as getting stronger and stronger, it is hardly plausible that Tacitus' Nero had become such a good speaker. The text is not absolutely consistent, but this is not its main concern. It rather aims at a stark contrast to the opening of book 13. Nero is not the mouthpiece of his teacher anymore, but has become his competent opponent.[98] He smartly and sophisticatedly refutes Seneca's arguments one by one. Tacitus' Nero has achieved rhetorical prowess, but only to turn it against his teacher. Seneca has taught Nero to his own disadvantage.[99] The impression one gets from reading about Nero's rhetorical development is disenchanting. A rhetorically dependent Nero who says what the senate expects is only the mouthpiece of Seneca. His speeches are not for him a genuine form of representation, as they were for his predecessors. Yet a rhetorically independent Nero uses his skills to others' disadvantage.

5 Divinity: From God-Like to Unhuman

5.1 *Ontological and Panegyrical Divinity*

Both Nero and Domitian included aspects of divinity in their historical representation of themselves.[100] Different media reflected their concepts of associ-

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97 Woodman 2010, who analyses Tacitean passages and Senecan intertexts, concludes that the speech of the Tacitean Seneca does not resemble the real Seneca (cf. Woodman 2010, 297–302). Tacitus' Seneca only speaks like the real Seneca in the scene and moment of his death, i.e. at a moment when he is not speaking to Nero and thus allowed to be himself (cf. Woodman 2010, 295–297; 308).

98 Cf. Syme 1958, 335: Seneca's "discourse was elegant (and not less the response, for both speakers had to be diplomatic and evasive: the pupil even surpassed the master)".

99 This is further illustrated by the several parallels of Nero's reply to Seneca's preceding speech. Cf. Woodman 2010, 305, referring to his intertextual analysis which shows that Tacitus' Seneca did not speak like the real Seneca: "Nero is speaking like Seneca; yet Seneca, as we have seen, is not speaking like himself; nor is he speaking like anyone else—apart from Nero. I suggest that Tacitus intends us to infer from this that over the years of their close association Seneca has turned himself into a cipher: he has developed a form of speech which is alien to himself but which he has placed specially at the disposal of the *princeps*. When Nero speaks, he speaks like Seneca's other self."

100 Rilinger 1996 argues that Nero's divine forms of representation were part of Seneca's idea

ation with gods. The most important relationship for Nero was that with Apollo and Sol. Nero was shown with the sungod's crown and as Apollo Citharoedus on coins.[101] The inscription that recorded the words of his proclamation of liberty for Greece picked up this official form of representation and referred to him as the "new sun".[102] The connection with Apollo is part of Nero's representation as artist and as youthful bringer of a new Golden Age.[103] Domitian's focus was on Jupiter and Minerva.[104] His representation as divine was connected to his image as a successful military leader, and supported his presentation as a strong, autocratic ruler.[105] Modern historians debate whether the historical *princeps* was thought to be a god already during his lifetime or only after his death.[106] An intermediate position argues that divine honours for an emperor during his lifetime should be understood as protreptic honours anticipating his divinization.[107] Only after his death would the senate see whether he was worthy of them. The divinization of the emperor was one last act of acknowledgment.

Things stand differently in the panegyrical discourse, in which the living emperor is called and described as a god or as god-like.[108] The most common methods to make an emperor a god or god-like are to call him a god, identify him with gods, or compare them with each other. Emperors can be called *deus* or *numen* directly.[109] Or they can be associated with certain gods. Comparis-

of autocracy, in which the emperor Nero did not have to compete with the aristocracy any longer, but only with the gods.

101 See Witschel 2006, 113 for the closeness of Nero and Sol in his mint after 59 CE.

102 See Witschel 2006, 114.

103 See Bergmann 1998, 133–230; Witschel 2006, 102.

104 Domitian was the first *princeps* to be shown together with a god on a coin series and the first to be depicted with Jupiter's thunderbolt. See Leberl 2004, 52–53.

105 The relationship of victoriousness, autocracy, and divinity in Domitian's imperial representation is discussed by Leberl 2004, 49–51 and Witschel 2006, 115. For the debate on the phrase *dominus et deus* see Witschel 2006, 114.

106 The first notion is prominently advanced by Clauss 1999, 17 at the very beginning of his book: "Der römische Kaiser war Gottheit. Er war dies von Anfang an, seit Caesar und Augustus, er war es zu Lebzeiten, er war es auch im Westen des römischen Reiches, in Italien, in Rom."

107 Cf. Peppel 2003, 70. See also Peppel 2003, 72–77 on divinization as a medium of control of the senate over the emperor: "Durch die postume Divinisierung wird das Leben des Kaisers aus Sicht der politischen Elite zu einem schwebenden Verfahren, in dem der Princeps zuerst Beweise dafür zu erbringen hat, daß er ein Gott ist" (Peppel 2003, 76).

108 On divinity in the panegyrical discourse on Nero and Domitian see Cordes 2017, 103–173, who discusses in detail most of the examples mentioned here.

109 Calp. *Ecl.* 1.46 (*dum populos deus ipse reget*); Calp. *Ecl.* 1.84–85 (*scilicet ipse deus Romanae pondera molis / fortibus excipiet sic inconcussa lacertis*); Calp. *Ecl.* 4.7–8 (*deus ipse … /*

ons with Jupiter are standard. They are less important for Nero,[110] but they take on an important role for Domitian.[111] Creating a divine or sacral aura is a crucial element in all of Statius' *Silvae*, for example.[112] Equalling or surpassing Augustus is an important part of panegyrical depictions.[113] Other deities are equalled or surpassed too, among them Saturn,[114] Mars,[115] Bacchus,[116] Hercules,[117] and Claudius.[118] For Nero, the closeness to Apollo and Sol is to the fore.[119] The emperor's divinity is not confined to himself: people who are close to him are divine too, or surpass comparable gods and goddesses.[120]

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qui populos urbesque regit pacemque togatam); Calp. *Ecl.* 4.84–85 (*qui nostras praesenti numine terras / perpetuamque regit iuvenili robore pacem*); Calp. *Ecl.* 4.132 (*numine Caesareo*); Calp. *Ecl.* 4.141 (*sit deus*); Calp. *Ecl.* 4.165 (*deus ipse*); Calp. *Ecl.* 7.75 (*indulgente deo*); Calp. *Ecl.* 7.76 (*venerandum … numen*); Mart. 5.8.1 (*edictum domini deique nostri*). Domitian is addressed in the form of a hymn in Mart. 2.91; 2.92; 5.1. See also Leberl 2004, 56–57.

110 See Schubert 1998, 424. There are, however, some exceptions. Calpurnius Siculus has *Caesar* at least very close to Jupiter: *Iuppiter ipse parens, cui tu iam proximus, ecce, / Caesar abes* (Calp. *Ecl.* 4.93–94). Nero is also described as Jupiter or another god, just with the outward appearance of a human being: *Tu quoque mutata seu Iuppiter ipse figura, / Caesar, ades seu quis superum sub imagine falsa / mortalique lates* (*es enim deus*) (Calp. *Ecl.* 4.142–144).

111 A few examples of texts that compare Domitian to Jupiter and make him equal or superior to him may suffice: Mart. 1.6; 4.1; 4.8; 5.6.9; 6.10; 6.83; 7.7.5; 7.56; 8.24; 9.20; 9.91. See also Mause 1994, 213; Lorenz 2002, 122.

112 See Leberl's summary of his interpretation of Statius in Leberl 2004, 241–243.

113 For Nero excelling Augustus see Calp. *Ecl.* 1.54–56 (only Nero has brought peace, not Augustus); *Clem.* 1.11.1–3 (Nero's rise to power was not as bloody as Octavian's) with Cordes 2017, 257–258. Excelling Augustus is implicit in Calp. *Ecl.* 1.72–73 (*moremque fori vultumque priorem / reddet et afflictum melior deus auferet aevum*). The second *Carmen Einsidlense* shows Nero fulfilling all the Augustan and Virgilian promises (see Schubert 1998, 418). For Nero's connection with Iulus-Ascanius and Troy in the context of the Aeneas-successor Augustus see Schubert 1998, 58–59. Domitian is paralleled with Augustus (Mart. 4.11) and addressed as Augustus (Mart. 4.27.1). Domitian's consulates are depicted as better than those of Augustus in Stat. *Silv.* 4.1: Augustus earned his consulship only late (see Cordes 2017, 232–242).

114 See Calp. *Ecl.* 1.64: *altera Saturni referet Latialia regna.*

115 See Mart. 7.2: Domitian's corslet is better than the shield of Mars.

116 See Mart. 8.26: Domitian excels Bacchus regarding wealth and luxuriousness.

117 See Mart. 9.101: Domitian's deeds are greater than those of Hercules.

118 See Calp. *Ecl.* 4.31 (*spes magis arridet*): there is more hope under Nero than under Claudius. Nero's times are depicted as better than Claudius' in Calp. *Ecl.* 1.54–73 and in the *Apocolocyntosis* (see Cordes 2017, 257–258).

119 The divine beauty of Nero-Apollo is presented as a sign of the quality of the reign (cf. Schubert 1998, 415), see Calp. *Ecl.* 7.85 (*et Martis vultus et Apollinis*). The *Carmen Einsidlense 1* equals Nero with Apollo. See also *Carm. Einsidl.* 2.38 (*iam regnat Apollo*); 2.87 (*facundo comitatus Apolline Caesar*).

120 For Vespasian see Stat. *Silv.* 1.1.31; 1.1.97–98 (with Mause 1994, 208–209); for Julia (excelling

Scholarship on this aspect of panegyrical literature has put much effort into distinguishing different grades of divinity within these texts, but the question whether the emperors are compared to gods, appear as gods, or are identical with them in the panegyrical texts does not in fact do justice to them.[121] The texts rather give different, sometimes intentionally ambiguous accounts of the divinity of the emperor. This ambiguity in the panegyrical texts reflects the same ambiguity concerning the theomorphic image of the emperor in statues, inscriptions, and coins. It may be analysed as a strategy that makes the praise safe against readings of the text that would consider this degree of exalting the emperor to be something negative.[122] To understand the social effect of panegyrical literature it is less important to distinguish different forms and grades of divinity within the texts. One rather has to realize that the praise in panegyrical literature implies that the divine status of the emperor does not depend on the actual process of divinization of the emperor after his death, a process that involves the senate. The divine status, so panegyrical literature, does not depend on any political institution. We can hence conceive of panegyrical literature as an instrument that takes power away from the senate.[123] 'Panegyrical divinization' does not need the senate to present the emperor as divine.

Critical literature written after the emperor's death is based on a different situation: the senate had not made the historical Nero and Domitian gods. So once they were dead, it was clear that they were indeed not divine.[124] Differently from the panegyrical texts, historiography accepts the senate's power in the process of divinization, which could not begin before the emperor's death. Tacitus explicitly highlights this boundary between god and human when he names the death of the emperor as a condition for his divine veneration, prominently at the very end of book 15: *nam deum honor principi non ante habetur, quam agere inter homines desierit* (*Ann.* 15.74.3). This statement reacts to and

Juno and Venus) see Mart. 6.13; for Earinus (compared to Ganymede) see Mart. 9.11; 9.16; 9.36; for Domitian's future child see Mart. 6.3; for the whole Flavian dynasty see Mart. 9.1 and Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.59. For Domitian and his divine relatives see Stat. *Silv.* 1.1.74; 4.3.139; Mart. 9.101.21–22.

121 Sauter 1934 distinguishes 18 forms in which Domitian was sacralized. Helpful as these grades may be to illustrate the variety of Martial's panegyrics, his poems are too disparate to divide them into different grades and compare them by these grades, see Cordes 2017, 135–141.

122 Cf. Cordes 2017, 118–120; 126 on this intentional ambivalence of panegyrical texts on divinity.

123 Cf. Cordes 2017, 155.

124 Hence Pliny remarks tongue-in-cheek that Domitian's divinity did not help him against the conspiracy (*longe tunc illi divinitas sua*, *Pan.* 49.1).

nullifies panegyrical literature which praises the divinity of a living emperor. But even though from an ex-post view history had proven that Nero and Domitian were not divine, critical *post mortem* literature applies further strategies that deconstruct their panegyrical image. First, by contrast with these descriptions as super-humans, historiographical discourse approximates emperors to people who are—from a Roman viewpoint—less than human: as will be shown later,[125] bad emperors are depicted in terms of femininity, foreignness, or slavery. These concepts structurally supplant the associations with divinity presented in panegyrical discourse. Second, historiography deconstructs more complex panegyrical narratives, in which, for example, the reaction of the emperor's surroundings—people, animals, and nature—to his divinity is depicted, or the emperor's interactions with gods and goddesses.

5.2 *Narratives of Emperors, Gods, and People*

5.2.1 Reacting to the Emperor-God: People, Animals, Nature

A more complex technique of illustrating divinity in panegyrical texts is to describe how the emperor's surroundings interact with him and react to him. The way people, animals, and nature understand an emperor in the text can indicate his god-like status. In historiographical deconstruction, the reactions depicted discredit the emperor's divinity accordingly.

In panegyrical literature, the emperor's divinity is acknowledged first of all by other people.[126] Ladas and Apollo praise Nero's voice in panegyrical discourse (*Carm. Einsidl.* 1.34; Sen. *Apocol.* 4.1.23). In Tacitus, by contrast, it is Nero who thinks about his own voice enthusiastically and who reproaches Thrasea Paetus that he did not make sacrifices to his heavenly voice (*pro salute principis aut caelesti voce immolavisse*, *Ann.* 16.22.1). The passage illustrates that, in the critical discourse, the *princeps* is not seen as a god by others, but, to the contrary, actively demands acknowledgement of his divine status and reproaches people who do not accept it. This is also implied in the speech of Servilia, who says in her defence that she always included Nero among the gods (*nulla mihi principis mentio nisi inter numina fuit*, *Ann.* 16.31.2). But then those who offer veneration and divine honours to an emperor, as panegyrical discourse does,[127]

125 See p.101–108.

126 This is also true of Domitian: be it the speaker of a poem (Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.10–13) or an enemy of the emperor such as the Dacian Degis (Mart. 5.3), people sense Domitian's divinity. The Tacitean texts that have survived do not allow us to see how Tacitus deconstructed such views on Domitian.

127 Divine honours in panegyrical discourse are offered, for example, by Statius to Domitian: *certus ames terras et quae tibi templa dicamus / ipse colas* ("Faithfully may you love earth

are clearly unmasked as flatterers or actors by the Tacitean narrator. The offer of divine honours for Nero's child, which died before it was born, are those of sycophants (*Ann.* 15.23.3).[128] And only the Augustiani, who are paid by Nero, call his voice and his physical appearance divine (*formam principis vocemque deum vocabulis appellantes*, *Ann.* 14.15.5).

Animals, too, are characterized by their relationship with the emperor and are used to evaluate him positively in panegyrical discourse.[129] In Calpurnius Siculus, the sound of Nero's name makes the animals (and plants) strong and fertile (Calp. *Ecl.* 4.102–104; 112–116). In Martial's *Liber spectaculorum* the animals feel the emperor's *numen* (e.g. Mart. *Spect.* 17; 30). Geese, which are to be sacrificed for Domitian, go to the altar voluntarily (*ipse suas anser properavit laetus ad aras*, Mart. 9.31.5). Martial's *leo-lepidus* epigrams (1.6; 1.14; 1.22; 1.48; 1.51; 1.60; 1.104) vary the motif of a tamed lion, an allusion to Domitian, and a hare, which can be identified with the poet.[130] The king of the animals and the *princeps* are both showing clemency by sparing minor beings; the tamed animals in Domitian's games and his sacred fish (Mart. 4.30) play on the idea that gods and god-like human beings have the power to tame animals.[131] The relationship of the emperor to animals, as far as we can judge from the texts that have survived, is not as important for Tacitus' historiographical deconstruction as it is for panegyrical literature.[132] However, the depiction of Tigellinus' banquet is interwoven with some animalistic elements, such as lycanthropy, which denigrate Nero.[133]

Panegyrical literature also attributes to the emperor positive effects on nature.[134] In Calpurnius Siculus, the sound of Nero's name makes the woods fall

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and yourself frequent the temples we dedicate to you", Stat. *Silv.* 1.1.105–106). For prayers to gods for Domitian see Mart. 7.60 (to Jupiter); 8.2 (to Janus).

128 See also *Ann.* 13.8; 15.23. After her death, Poppaea is praised for being the mother of a divine child (*Ann.* 16.6.2).

129 Martial's praise of Domitian influencing animals is collected by Weinreich 1928, 166–170, and includes e.g. elephants (Mart. *Spect.* 20), panthers and tigers (Mart. 1.104), lions and hares (Mart. 1.6; 1.14; 1.22; 1.48; 1.51; 1.50; 1.104); see Cordes 2017, 186–189.

130 For the *leo-lepidus* poems cf. Lorenz 2002, 126–134.

131 For the custom of keeping sacred fish see Moreno Soldevila 2006, 258. Cf. Howell 1980, 119. See also the interpretation of Mart. 4.30.3–5 in Cordes 2017, 98.

132 Juvenal parodies this panegyrical motif of the emperor's influence on animals when in his satire a fish itself wants to be caught (Iuv. 4.65–69).

133 See Woodman 1998, 176. Cf. Woodman 1998, 179 referring to *Ann.* 15.37.3–4: "Hence Nero's behaviour, as described by Tacitus, is not only foreign but also serves to keep alive the suggestions of animalism in *lupanaria* and *grege* earlier."

134 For further examples and detailed interpretations of the passages mentioned here see Cordes 2017, 176–182.

silent (Calp. *Ecl.* 4.97–98) and it warms the earth (Calp. *Ecl.* 4.109–110). Comets are interpreted as positive signs for a reign, announcing happiness (Calp. *Ecl.* 1.77–88). Statius has Janus declare that Domitian's gentle and clement character warms the winter: *aspicis ut templis alius nitor, altior aris / ignis et ipsa meae tepeant tibi sidera brumae / moribus aequa tuis?* ("Do you see how a different gleam is in the temples, how the flame mounts higher on the altars, and how the very stars of my winter become warm for you, equal to your manners?", *Silv.* 4.1.23–25). Furthermore, the weather supports the emperor when white snow falls onto the black cloak of a certain Horatius, who had neglected Domitian's decree that one should wear only white in the theatre (Mart. 4.2). Such mutual understanding between the emperor and his non-human surroundings is deconstructed in historiographical discourse. To study, again, the example of Nero:[135] on the night when Nero plans to kill his mother, the gods render the night bright with stars and quiet with a calm sea as if to expose the crime: *noctem sideribus inlustrem et placido mari quietam quasi convincendum ad scelus dii praebuere* (*Ann.* 14.5.1). After the matricide, the view of this very sea oppresses Nero (*maris illius et litorum gravis aspectus*, *Ann.* 14.10.3).

5.2.2 Interactions of Emperors and Gods

Panegyrical literature also depicts the relationship of the emperor with the gods. Several narratives show emperors and gods communicating with each other in different ways: gods talk to the emperor or about him, they take action on his behalf, are on his side and respect him, they even accept that he surpasses them. The texts construct a relationship of intimacy, support, and supremacy, which we may here survey briefly. They will later be deconstructed in historiographical discourse.

Emperors and gods are shown as close, similar, and comparable to each other in panegyrical texts. Especially Nero and Phoebus/Apollo are depicted as intimates, when Seneca has Phoebus describe himself as similar to Nero in appearance and voice in the *Apocolocyntosis* (*ille mihi similis vultu similisque decore / nec cantu nec voce minor*, Sen. *Apocol.* 4.1 [22–23]). One aspect of this close relationship is that gods also support the emperors, with or without them realizing it. They take up this role in Neronian and Domitianic panegyrics, for example when Phoebus by his song and his very presence supports the Fates in spinning Nero's thread of life (*Phoebus adest cantuque iuvat gaudetque futuris /*

135 For Domitian see Pliny's *Panegyricus*, which depicts Domitian as afraid of nature and its elements. See Cordes 2017, 195–198 on Plin. *Pan.* 81–82: the contrast in the *Panegyricus* is again with Trajan. He is depicted as master of nature not due to his aura but for rational reasons—his military virtue and his infrastructural and organizational skills.

et laetus nunc plectra movet, nunc pensa ministrat, Sen. *Apocol.* 4.1. [15–17]). The sky and, as is hinted, Domitian's divine dead son provide weather suitable for Domitian in Martial (Mart. 4.2–3). In Statius, Janus and Jupiter grant Domitian a long youth and life (*Silv.* 4.1), and a god is creator of the emperor's equestrian statue (*Silv.* 1.1).[136]

Gods in panegyrical texts can go further and acknowledge the emperor's supremacy. The relation between god and human being is thus reversed in the *Apocolocyntosis* when the Fates admire both Nero's life-thread and himself (*mirantur pensa sorores*, Sen. *Apocol.* 4.1 [7]) and when Phoebus states that Nero's fate is greater than human and that he wants it to stay thus: *vincat mortalis tempora vitae* (Sen. *Apocol.* 4.1 [21]).[137] In Calpurnius Siculus, Faunus praises the future emperor as a god (*Ecl.* 1.33–88). The gods in Lucan's proem, in which Nero is compared to Jupiter and Apollo, are so happy about the new god Nero and so welcoming that he is allowed to choose which god he wants to be (Luc. prooem. 45–59). Mythological figures also give panegyrical speeches in Statius' *Silvae* so that the poet does not have to present his praise inappropriately and unconvincingly in his own voice.[138] Martial turns the relation of Domitian and the gods around when he describes gods sacrificing for Domitian (*non sunt haec hominum, Germanice, gaudia tantum, / sed faciunt ipsi nunc, puto, sacra dei*, Mart. 8.4.3–4), or being in his debt (Mart. 9.3). Domitian is depicted as superior to Jupiter (e.g. Mart. 4.1; 4.3; 6.83; 9.91). This idea is not confined to merely textual narratives. The Cancelleria Relief also shows Domitian and a god in changed roles: it depicts the emperor as master of Minerva.[139]

Such a close connection between gods and emperors is deconstructed in historiographical discourse. Emperors are rather depicted as close with debauched villains such as Sejanus and Tigellinus. Tacitus' Nero is not depicted as intimate with the gods.[140] Nonetheless, the rumour that someone else might be close to the gods is dangerous to such a person, for example to Rubellius Plautus (*Ann.* 14.22.2). Unlike in panegyrical discourse, the communication between emperor and gods is only one-way. Nero addresses gods, but they do

136 Cf. Leberl 2004, 144.

137 For mythical narratives that point out the emperor's divinity in panegyrical literature see Cordes 2017, 106–112.

138 Cf. Coleman 1999, 69 in her interpretation of Stat. *Silv.* 1.1: the figure of Curtius in the poem "legitimates a grandiose verbal register for his speech that would sound incongruous if Statius were to employ it *in propria persona*".

139 See Leberl 2004, 49–51.

140 The connection of Nero with Apollo is also not mentioned in the *Octavia*, cf. Cordes 2017, 130.

not react.[141] He uses Apollo as an argument for his interest in singing (*Ann.* 14.14.1) and honours Sol, whom he holds responsible for detecting the Pisonian conspiracy (*qui occulta coniurationis suo numine retexisset, Ann.* 15.74.1). He thanks the gods that a collapse of a theatre happened only after the people had left (*Ann.* 15.34.1). Nero makes use of Apollo and Sol for his purposes, writes songs for gods (*Ann.* 15.34.1), but they never answer.

Focusing on the other party to the communication, we can see that the gods in Tacitus are far from showing the respect and support they offer in panegyrical texts. They never express any positive thoughts about the emperor, let alone professions of his supremacy. The gods are either not interested in taking part in events on earth, indifferent towards good and bad (*sine cura deum, Ann.* 14.12.2; *aequitate deum erga bona malaque documenta, Ann.* 16.33.1), or they even act against the emperor and his people. Generally, there is no clear, uniform answer to the question whether gods, fate, or the law of causality determine human actions and events.[142] But people conceive of the gods as communicating via signs.[143] They are depicted as afraid of the gods' wrath (*Ann.* 1.30.3), and use it to explain negative events on earth (*Ann.* 13.17.1; 14.22.4). The narrator himself states that the gods' wrath was finally directed against all Romans (*Ann.* 16.16.2).[144] That Nero's deeds are the reason for such an opposition to mankind, is hinted at (*Ann.* 16.13.1).[145] That the gods do not support or agree with him, is pointed out in several instances: the gods complicate the murder of Agrippina (*Ann.* 14.5.1), as we just saw; Vesta possibly frightens Nero when he visits her temple (*Ann.* 15.36.2); and Fortuna turns against him (*Ann.* 16.1.1). Nero can be an enemy of the gods too: he mistreats them when he robs their temples

141 Tacitus' Nero is hence in contrast with Pliny's Trajan, to whom the gods grant a place among themselves precisely because he does not aim at it (*sic fit, ut di ⟨tibi⟩ summum inter homines fastigium servent, cum deorum ipse non adpetas*, Plin. *Pan.* 52.2).

142 See the reflections on gods, chance, and causality in *Ann.* 1.28 and *Ann.* 6.22.

143 Comets and thunderbolts are read as divine signs in *Ann.* 14.22.

144 A hostile attitude of the gods against the Romans is also assumed in *Hist.* 1.3.2: *non esse curae deis securitatem nostram, esse ultionem.* Cf. Griffin 2009, 169, discussing divine intervention as a mode of interpreting events in Tacitus: "For the most part, however, he suggests a hostile role for the gods." For the wrath of the gods see also *Ann.* 4.1.2 and *Hist.* 2.38.2 with Griffin 2009, 172: "Divine displeasure is adduced as an additional (and superfluous) explanation to darken the picture of human artfulness (A. 4.1.2) or madness (H. 2.38.2)."

145 It is illuminating to compare the different depiction of the destruction of the Capitoline temple in *Hist.* 3.72.1, the *facinus post conditam urbem luctuosissimum foedissimumque rei publicae populi Romani* ("the most deplorable and horrible disaster that had ever befallen the people of Rome since the foundation of the city"), which happened *furore principum*, but is not described as an attack on the gods. For the fire cf. Sailor 2008, 205–249.

(*Ann.* 15.45.1; cf. *Agr.* 6.5).[146] Nero's relationship with the gods in Tacitus thus comes close to the relationship with the gods of the figure Nero in the *Octavia*. In this play, Nero supports the image of himself as slanderer of the gods.[147] He expels the gods from their temples and has a reign without gods (*Oct.* 912–913).

6 Atmosphere: From Golden Age to the Dynamics of Bad Times

6.1 *Aurea Aetas*

All the topics of imperial representation discussed, taken together, create a certain 'atmosphere' around an emperor and his reign in the text. By this term I refer to an image of a reign that is characterized by a certain attitude of the people towards their times, especially their emotional responses, and by the core virtues and ideas that are presented as the basis of this reign. A motif that manages to conceptualize such a complex phenomenon as 'atmosphere' in textual, but also in visual terms, is the *aurea aetas* motif.[148] Metaphors of a Golden Age and descriptions of an era as excellent are crucial to panegyrics in general and to Neronian and Domitianic panegyrics in particular, which present their own times as superior to other eras, especially in contrast with the preceding emperor: with the praised *princeps* a new era begins which avoids the faults of the old one and which stops or prevents civil wars.[149]

Nero's era is praised as a new Golden Age in Calpurnius Siculus (*aurea secura cum pace renascitur aetas*, *Ecl.* 1.42; *aurea … saecula*, *Ecl.* 4.6–7) and Seneca (*Apocol.* 4.1 [9]).[150] The core virtues acclaimed for Nero and his new age are *pax*, *iustitia*, *moderatio*, *innocentia*, *felicitas*, and *clementia* (e.g. Calp. *Ecl.* 1.46–73). Through these virtues Nero is set into the tradition of Augustan ideology, his era is conceived as a restoration and emulation of Augustus' era.[151] But

146 Cf. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 31.148 for Nero robbing the sanctuaries of Olympia and Delphi.

147 Cf. Cordes 2017, 131.

148 The poets Hesiod (*Op.* 106–126), Virgil (*Ecl.* 4.37–45), and Ovid (*Met.* 1.89–112) give descriptions of the Golden Age that include the standard motifs, which have influenced later accounts.

149 Cf. the summaries in Cordes 2017, 253–255; 304–306.

150 Calpurnius' *Ecloga 1* prophesies a Golden Age, which is fulfilled by Calpurnius' *Ecloga 4*, cf. Schubert 1998, 81. See also *Carm. Einsidl.* 2.22. For the importance of gold for Neronian propaganda see also Ash 2015, 270–271. However, Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* show traces of a contemporary interpretation of Neronian times as animating fear, see Gauly 2004, 218–224.

151 According to Schubert 1998, 413–418 this is one of two branches of Neronian panegyrics:

Nero is presented as even better than the first emperor, and as the one who—allegedly—has truly ended the civil war (Calp. *Ecl.* 1.46–68).[152] He surpasses the positive example of Augustus because he does not have to fight for power, but is loved (Sen. *Clem.* 1.4.3), just as he contrasts with the negative example of Claudius in the *Apocolocyntosis*.[153] Lucan praises Nero's times as recompense for the horror of the civil wars: *multum Roma tamen debet civilibus armis, / quod tibi res acta est* (prooem. 44–45). This Golden Age free of war is perceived as such by the people living in it. The whole world is safe, happy, or invited to be happy (Calp. *Ecl.* 1.36–37; 74–76), and earth, people, gods, and nature love and revere the emperor (Calp. *Ecl.* 4.107–121). Something that is new in Neronian panegyrics is the praise of luxury. While the Golden Age had been associated mostly with simplicity in earlier panegyrical literature, material gold plays an important role in Neronian literature: in Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, for example the symbolic meaning of gold is 'materialized' when Nero's life-thread turns into real gold.[154]

Similarly, but with different emphases, Domitian's era is welcomed as a new age by the contemporary poets.[155] That the *aurea aetas* motif itself is not as important in Domitianic panegyric may be explained by earlier panegyrical accounts: it could not be used extensively precisely because Neronian panegyric had drawn on it so much.[156] What we find instead are comparisons with other epochs, as in Stat. *Silv.* 1.1, or comparisons of Domitian with historical figures (Alexander the Great, Hector, Aeneas, Caesar, Curtius).[157] Domitian's era is especially praised for the imperial virtues of *civilitas* and *liberalitas* (Stat. *Silv.* 1.6).[158] Moral and legal actions of Domitian, such as his censorships,

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Schubert distinguishes between neo-Augustan motifs on the one hand (in the *Apocolocyntosis*, *De clementia*, Calpurnius Siculus, the second *Carmen Einsidlense*, and Lucan), and specifically Neronian motifs such as Nero's artistic achievements on the other (also in the *Apocolocyntosis*, Lucan's *Laudes*, and the first *Carmen Einsidlense*), which become more influential after 59 CE. An example of Augustan restoration in Neronian times is *Carm. Einsiedl.* 2.24: *totaque in antiquos redierunt saecula mores*.

152 Cf. Cordes 2017, 258–263.

153 For these two kinds of comparison (augmentation and contrast) in general see Arist. *Rhet.* 1368a21–24; Quint. *Inst.* 8.4.9 (distinguishing *amplificatio* and *comparatio*), and in panegyrical literature see Cordes 2017, 81–82.

154 Cf. Cordes 2017, 26–28.

155 See Nauta 2002, 397–402, also about the Golden Age.

156 Cf. Nauta 2010, 255–258. Exceptions are Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.39–42; Mart. 6.3.

157 This includes the strategy of presenting possible counter-arguments (the contemporary times are not the best times ever) and refuting them, as in Mart. 9.70. See Cordes 2017, 282–285; 293–294.

158 See Newlands 2002, 227–259; Leberl 2004, 181–198; Rühl 2006, 329–335.

theatre edicts, and marriage laws, account for justice and the return of *pudor* (Mart. 9.5).[159] The world looks approvingly to Rome and the emperor.[160] That his people, and even barbarians (*terretur vultu barbarus et fruitur*, Mart. 7.5.6), love him, is expressed by their wishing for and enjoying his presence (Mart. 7.2; 7.6; 7.7; 7.8; 8.8; 8.11; 8.15; 8.21; 9.79).[161] Even in the atmosphere of luxury in the theatre, speaker and visitors have eyes only for Domitian (Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.14–17; 1.6.65–84). In official media[162] and in panegyrical texts, Domitian is approximated to and rendered similar to Augustus. But it is noted that no other time can be compared to Domitian's age.[163]

The atmosphere surrounding these emperors in the critical discourse is quite the opposite.[164] In Tacitus, the joy and reverence, typical of Golden Age depictions, felt by everyone near the emperor, are generally supplanted by fear, in the depiction both of Nero and of Domitian. Cruelty has abolished pity (*Ann.* 6.19.3). Night and darkness provide a dangerous atmosphere in individual scenes.[165]

The idea of the Golden Age is expressed very literally in its deconstruction in an episode about Nero and Caesellius Bassus (*Ann.* 16.1–3), strikingly opening book 16, in which Nero's *vanitas* grows strongly.[166] Fortune is described as making a fool of Nero because of this vanity and the promises of the mentally unbalanced Caesellius Bassus: *inlusit dehinc Neroni fortuna per vanitatem ipsius*

159 This is pointed out with regard to his edicts concerning the theatre (Mart. 4.2; 5.8; 5.14; 5.23; 5.25; 5.27; 5.38; 5.41; 6.4; 6.7) and in relation to his marriage laws (Mart. 6.2; 6.4; 6.6; 6.22; 6.31; 6.39; 6.45; 6.67; 6.90; 6.91). See Lorenz 2002, 152–162. Moral legislation has to be seen in close connection with Domitian being the first *censor perpetuus* from 85 CE onwards (cf. Leberl 2004, 61).

160 See Rühl 2006, 358 for the image of Domitian in the *Silvae*.

161 Domitian's imperial presence is also a strong feature on the coins; see Leberl 2004, 72.

162 For Domitian's Augustan outlook on his coins see Leberl 2004, 45. For his portrait in the Museo del Palazzo dei Conservatori resembling the Julio-Claudians see Leberl 2004, 70. By treating Augustus as ideal *princeps* and the Julio-Claudians as the dynasty of the principate *par excellence*, it became possible to invoke him as a legitimation for Domitian's own principate, see Leberl 2004, 71.

163 Martial praises his reign, to which no other time can be compared, regarding triumphs, the gods, the city itself, and *libertas* (Mart. 5.19.1–6). There are roses in Roman winter, which makes Rome superior to Egypt (Mart. 6.80).

164 For the *Octavia* (416–434) see Cordes 2017, 30–32.

165 See e.g. *Ann.* 13.20.1; 13.20.3; 13.25.2; 14.4.3. For the importance of the scene for Tacitus' dramatic techniques see Billerbeck 1991.

166 Ash 2015 discusses the style and possible literary interactions of this passage with other texts (Petronius, Greek Dictys, Latin Dictys). Suerbaum 2015, 452–457 discusses this passage in comparison with Suetonius' version of the same episode, and concludes that Tacitus developed it in more detail in order to paint a negative picture of Nero.

et promissa Caeselli Bassi, qui origine Poenus, mente turbida (*Ann.* 16.1.1). Bassus had a dream that a cavern of enormous depth had been discovered on his land, which contained a large quantity of gold. In Neronian panegyrical literature the motif of finding gold is developed by Calpurnius Siculus, who praises it as an accomplishment of Nero's times that farmers are allowed to keep the gold they find on their land while ploughing (Calp. *Ecl.* 4.117–121).[167] In Tacitus, Bassus does not really find the gold. He only dreams about it and reports his dream to Nero, driven by his hope that it might be true, and adds the hypothesis that it might be the gold of Dido (*Ann.* 16.1.2). Nero simply believes Bassus without checking the facts and sends messengers to bring him the bounty as though it were really there (*non auctoris, non ipsius negotii fide satis spectata nec missis per quos nosceret an vera adferrentur*, *Ann.* 16.2.1). This incident is the prime topic taken up by the orators for eulogies on Nero during the *Quinquennalia*, which take place at the same time (*Ann.* 16.2.2). The orators, sure of Nero's gullibility (*securi de facilitate credentis*, *Ann.* 16.2.2), produce servile compositions that are both extremely eloquent and adulatory.[168] Their speeches, as Tacitus summarizes them, resemble descriptions of the *aurea aetas* in panegyrical literature: when they claim that the earth not only produces the ordinary crops and gold mixed with other metals, but that it now brings forth a new kind of fertility and that the gods are giving easy riches (*non enim solitas tantum fruges nec confusum in metallis aurum gigni, sed nova ubertate provenire terram et obvias opes deferre deos*, *Ann.* 16.2.2), they take up the role of panegyrical poets.[169] Tacitus states that in the meantime Nero's luxury had increased and he was spending all his resources in anticipation of the new riches on Bassus' land (*gliscebat interim luxuria spe inani*, *Ann.* 16.3.1). When Bassus finally starts looking for the gold, he behaves like people in depictions of the Iron Age who search for natural resources (cf., e.g., Ov. *Met.* 1.137–140). Bassus has to emerge from his folly and realize that his dream was misleading and wrong (*Ann.* 16.3.2). There are two different versions of what happened to him afterwards, to which we will come back later:[170] he either took his own life, or he was imprisoned, released, and his property taken as compensation for the missing treasure.

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167 For the scholarly debate on whether this reflects on a Neronian law see Cordes 2017, 255–256. Ash 2015, 282 also points to the passage in Calpurnius Siculus.

168 Ash 2015, 280–282 hence attributes joint guilt to the amoral society of Nero's times, and reads Tacitus' account as undercutting "the apparently black-and-white moralism" (Ash 2015, 280).

169 In the *Dialogus*, Maternus says that the Golden Age has had many poets, but few orators (*Dial.* 12.3). From this point of view, Nero's panegyrical orators in Tacitus are a rare exception.

170 See p.142.

6.2 *Dynamics of Bad Times*

In Neronian panegyrics the new golden times are presented as the final phase of the world. Historical development has found its end and climax, a *longue durée* of happiness. This impression of Nero's era is deconstructed by Tacitus: it appears as a time of fear in the critical discourse, both in the *Annals* and in the *Agricola*. This fear may have several levels: under Tiberius, people are afraid of their fear, of showing that they feel fear (*id ipsum paventes, quod timuissent, Ann.* 4.70.2). Often Tacitus is less interested in reconstructing 'facts' than in reconstructing the fear that drives people: whether people really saw sea-monsters on campaigns in Germany seems less important to Tacitus than the fear that they felt and that may have made them imagine these monsters (*visa sive ex metu credita, Ann.* 2.24.4); even the question whether Archelaus committed suicide or died a natural death is not important, since in either case fear of the *princeps* killed him (*Ann.* 2.42.3). The times are also depicted as full of change, instability, and uncertainty in Tacitus, an important feature to which we will come back later.[171] *fatum* does not grant a stable influence (*fato potentiae raro sempiternae, Ann.* 3.30.4) and even the happiness of the mighty is not forever (*adeo incertae sunt potentium res, Ann.* 12.42.3). When Tiberius' actions provide slight relief, the narrator points out that this is only for the time being (*modicum in praesens*[172] *levamentum, Ann.* 3.28.4). Change happens fast, can be dramatic, and concerns everyone, as the reader learns from Agrippina, who is culprit one moment and victim the next (*nihil rerum mortalium tam instabile ac fluxum est quam fama potentiae non sua vi nixa⟨e⟩*, "nothing in the world is as fickle and fleeting as a reputation gained for power that has no strength of its own", *Ann.* 13.19).[173] Not only for her is it true that things always get worse, even when they are already regarded as extremely bad. Agrippina is worse than Messalina (*Ann.* 12.7.3). Caligula is worse than Tiberius (*Ann.* 6.48.2). Tiberius' reign before the year 23 CE, which is marked as a watershed moment, was not depicted as an agreeable time. It is only later events, which are worse, that characterize these earlier years as positive in hindsight (cf. *Ann.* 4.6–7 on Tiberius before and after Drusus' death). Remembering, connecting the present to the past and to the future, as in Tiberius' case, can have negative connotations: the memory of something that enraged him lives on in his heart (*sed in animo revolvente iras, etiam si impetus offensionis languerat, memoria valebat, Ann.* 4.21).[174] Bad times come back (*Ann.* 6.18.1) and the Tacitean nar-

171 See chapter 5.
172 Cf. *in praesens* in *Ann.* 4.21.1.
173 Cf. Plancina in *Ann.* 6.26.3 and Messalina in *Ann.* 11.32.
174 Cf. the relevance of old hatred (*non occultante Tiberio vetus odium*) in *Ann.* 4.29.3.

rator pronounces a change for the worst (*honesta quidem, sed ex quis deterrima orerentur*, *Ann.* 11.38.4; *mutationem rerum in deterius portendi cognitum est crebris prodigiis*, *Ann.* 12.64.1), or describes something as merely not bad yet (*abditis adhuc vitiis*, *Ann.* 13.1.3).

This change is often accompanied by the strong momentum of a chain of events. Such a momentum is evoked, for example, when an event is characterized as the first in a series that leads to a certain result, as in Agrippina's case (*ut series futuri in Agrippinam exitii inciperet*, *Ann.* 4.52.1). A series of murders is often depicted as an unstoppable development with its own dynamic: Junius Silanus is introduced as the first victim in Nero's new principate (*prima novo principatu mors Iunii Silani*, *Ann.* 13.1.1)—and with *prima* opening the books on Nero's reign we expect several murders to follow; depicting the endless numbers of murders of the Pisonian conspiracy Tacitus gives the reader an intermediate summary that points out that funerals already fill up the city (*sed compleri interim urbs funeribus*, *Ann.* 15.71.1)—which underlines the dynamic of this negative development. The impression the reader gets throughout is that one does not know how to stop or change the course of history.[175] Better knowledge does not lead to better actions (*quo magis mirum habebatur gnarum meliorum, et quae fama clementiam sequeretur, tristiora malle*, "it was therefore found all the more astonishing that someone who knew the better course of action and the reputation that followed clemency, should prefer the harsher course", *Ann.* 4.31.2), and Tacitus' narrator states himself that he does not know what role is played by people's own actions or by chance (*Ann.* 4.20.3).

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175 This is similar to another text critical of Nero (with a different focus), the *Octavia* (429–434): here, the *collecta vitia* are depicted as growing inexorably in every age and as overflowing in the present times.

CHAPTER 4

Strategies of Deconstruction in Tacitus

1 Overview: How to Deconstruct Imperial Representation

In the previous chapter I have introduced different topics, contexts, and media of imperial representation, which are mirrored in panegyrical and critical texts. We have seen how the imperial image, which is constructed with the help of these topics in historical and panegyrical representation, can be deconstructed, i.e. re-interpreted in a negative way, in the critical, mainly historiographical discourse by referring to the same topics. This chapter moves from panegyrical-critical topics on to critical methods applied in deconstructing imperial representation. It addresses the question of which literary—mainly rhetorical and narratological—devices the Tacitean texts use to criticize forms of imperial representation, i.e. the image of the emperor constructed by himself, his entourage, or others through topics such as military actions, building programmes, and divinity.

I would like to distinguish three main literary strategies that present an emperor's actions and behaviour as negative.[1] These devices will be further differentiated in the course of the chapter. They are used both explicitly and implicitly and in various grades. First, something the emperor does or thinks may be presented with negative connotations. This is achieved by directly unfavourable additions, or by the presentation of moral foils to which the emperor is contrasted, especially the contrasting foils of moderate behaviour and gender (p.95–108). Second, an emperor's actions may be deconstructed when they are presented as based on negative reasons and as closely connected to his allegedly bad character and motives (p.109–123). Third, imperial behaviour may also be described as transgressing temporal or social logic (p.123–129). My analysis of the deconstruction of imperial representation through these three general strategies will focus on the rhetorical structure of Tacitus' texts and draws on works that have discussed Tacitus' rhetorical techniques, literary structures,

1 Syme 1958, 315 speaks of "the technique of comment, appraisement, and motivation". In my analysis, comment and motivation are means of appraisement. Winterling 2007, 116–117 briefly mentions similar techniques in the context of the unreliability of the texts as sources: "Sie verfolgen häufig das Ziel, die Handlungen der Kaiser als sinnlos und wirr erscheinen zu lassen. Dazu reißen sie sie aus dem Zusammenhang, lassen wichtige Begleitinformationen aus oder behaupten nachweisbar Falsches."

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and ways of presenting his material. In general, these devices become effective through the Tacitean narrator and mainly in a linear reading of the text. We will see later that Suetonius' deconstruction depends on different structural aspects of the text.[2]

2 Negative Connotations: 'Facts', Additions, and Foils

2.1 *Comments and Order*

It is a standard technique of deconstruction to turn something that could be presented as a positive 'fact' into something negative by a simple comment. This technique is employed effectively with 'facts' that run the risk of inviting praise. Thus comments are often placed after a hitherto positive evaluation.[3] There are, of course, abundant examples of Tacitus' technique of commenting negatively on behaviour, events, and actions. For instance, at first, Nero's buildings after the fire are described appreciatively. Even though Nero is said to have at least taken advantage of the destruction after the fire by building his own new palace (*Ann.* 15.42.1),[4] the space that was left in the city is used for buildings in a very effective and thoughtful way (*Ann.* 15.43.1–4). Tacitus' Nero acts deliberately (*Ann.* 15.43.1), promises to spend his own money on the building programme (*Ann.* 15.43.2), takes actions himself (*Ann.* 15.43.3), and is depicted as competent and as completely in control of the situation (*Ann.* 15.43.4).[5] The assertion that these measures were welcomed for their utility and their aesthetic value seems to provide a suitable summary of Nero's building endeavours: *ea ex utilitate accepta decorem quoque novae urbi attulere* (*Ann.* 15.43.5). But the passage does not end here. It concludes, rather, with a negative statement that at least calls Nero's building practice into question: some people thought (*erant tamen qui crederent*) that Nero's new buildings were harmful to health as they provided no shade and produced a more oppressive heat (*Ann.* 15.43.5). The text, fully aware of its adversative ending, as the *tamen* (*Ann.* 15.43.5) indicates, leaves the reader somewhat disconcerted: how should one weigh the utility in cases of fire and the pleasing outlook against the possible harm for everyone's health?[6]

2 See chapter 10.

3 Cf. Hausmann 2012, 143 on "relativierende Nachträge" als "Mittel der Leserlenkung". He distinguishes between accusation of hypocrisy, labelling something as an exception, and vituperation.

4 Cf. p.67.

5 His activity here contrasts sharply with his lack of interest in military actions (for which see p.57–60).

6 There are also examples of imperial performances that are potentially positive and only

2.2 *Hubris versus Moderatio*

A less explicit way to frame an element of imperial representation negatively is to depict it as a form of hubris. The emperor is shown as exceeding an acceptable degree of something, acting immoderately, or crossing a certain moral, legal, or social boundary. Both the degree and the boundary may be named explicitly or may operate more implicitly as a background foil to the form of imperial representation under consideration.

We have already analysed some of Nero's forms of imperial representation as hubristic and without measure in Tacitus, especially his building endeavours (cf. *incredibilium cupitor*, *Ann.* 15.42.2) and his forms of public entertainment (cf. the banquet of Tigellinus, *Ann.* 15.37.1–3).[7] Tacitus' Galba offers a kind of summary of Nero which focuses on Nero's immoderateness: in his adoption speech he claims that Nero was brought down precisely by his *immanitas* and *luxuria* (*Hist.* 1.16.2). This excessiveness of Tacitus' Nero pertains not only to his public image, but also to his emotions. When Poppaea is pregnant and Nero's daughter is born, he receives this event *ultra mortale gaudium*, exceeding mortal joy (*Ann.* 15.23.1). When the child dies after four months Nero is depicted as being as immoderate in his grief as he was in his joy (*atque ipse ut laetitiae, ita maeroris immodicus egit*, *Ann.* 15.23.3). Being excessive both in positive and negative emotions, Tacitus' Nero reacts completely differently from Tacitus' Agricola, to whom we can contrast him here. Agricola turns a similar emotional reaction into military actions: in grief for his dead son, war is for him *inter remedia* (*Agr.* 29.1).

Instead of producing a list of Nero's actions that are depicted as immoderate, I would like to focus on an instructive passage in which Tacitus' Nero is reluctant to embrace moderation on an abstract level in an argumentative context, namely his debate with Seneca when the latter tries to retire. In favour of his retirement Seneca presents several arguments concerning moderation. He

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become negative by explicit comments, for example Tiberius' conduct in rejecting excessive honours. Tacitus' Tiberius does not accept the title *parens patriae* and sharply criticizes those who had spoken of his divine occupations (*divinas occupationes*) and of him as their master (*ipsumque dominum dixerant*) (*Ann.* 2.87). But this is not, as panegyrical literature would do it, interpreted as modest behaviour. Instead, Tiberius' behaviour is criticized as the reason (*unde*) for the restricted and hazardous language (*angusta et lubrica oratio*) under an emperor who feared liberty and hated flattery (*sub principe, qui libertatem metuebat, adulationem oderat*) (*Ann.* 2.87). A potentially praiseworthy action is interpreted as a symptom of a *princeps* who provides his subjects with a dilemma: of the two options, *libertas* and *adulatio*, neither can be successful. We will come back to the function of such Tacitean oppositions later. See p.149–154.

7 See p.67–72.

says that the only thing his good fortune lacks is the ability to make moderate use of it (*ut nihil felicitati meae desit nisi moderatio eius*, *Ann.* 14.53.2). He also argues that both he himself and Nero have reached their limit (*sed uterque mensuram implevimus*, *Ann.* 14.54.1), the *princeps* in how much he has given to his friend Seneca, and Seneca in how much he has accepted from the *princeps*. But Tacitus' Nero is resistant to such arguments. He does not accept Seneca's wish for *moderatio* and rest, as he is afraid that they might be interpreted as a sign of his own greed and cruelty: *non tua moderatio si reddideris pecuniam, nec quies, si reliqueris principem, sed mea avaritia, meae crudelitatis metus in ore omnium versabitur* (*Ann.* 14.56.2). In the context of this debate, in which Tacitus' Nero argues against Seneca and opposes his notions about *moderatio*, he exhibits a crucial non-understanding and non-acceptance of moderation as such.

Differently from Tacitus' Seneca in this passage, other figures surrounding the emperors are evaluated by their hubris and their lack of *moderatio* too. The emperor's immoderateness often fits well with his entourage's lack of measure. Pallas exceeds the measure suitable for a freedman by his harsh arrogance (*Pallas tristi adrogantia modum liberti egressus*, *Ann.* 13.2.2). The conduct of Nero's mother Agrippina is shown as immoderate and as crossing existing boundaries several times. That she is seated before the Roman standards when Caratacus praises and thanks her in the same way he thanks Claudius, is pointed out as new (*novum sane*) and as uncommon in the manners of old (*moribus veterum insolitum*) (*Ann.* 12.37.4): Agrippina's crossing of boundaries is underlined by explicitly calling it an innovation twice (*novum*; *insolitum*). Tacitus associates her high position with her unique role as daughter of a commander and sister, wife, and mother of a *princeps* (*feminae, quam imperatore genitam, sororem eius qui rerum potitus sit et coniugem et matrem fuisse, unicum ad hunc diem exemplum est*, *Ann.* 12.42.2). When Claudius receives divine honours and the same funeral ceremony as Augustus, Agrippina wants to exceed the sumptuousness of Livia (*aemulante Agrippina proaviae Liviae magnificentiam*, *Ann.* 12.69.3). With regard to her son Nero she can change fast from being immoderate in restraining him to being excessively obsequious (*ut nimia nuper coercendo filio, ita rursum intemperanter demissa*, *Ann.* 13.13.2).

In describing imperial behaviour as crossing certain boundaries the historiographical discourse—perhaps surprisingly, at first sight—shares a strategy with panegyrical literature. A crucial element of panegyrics is to present imperial actions as bigger, better, more important than ever before, or as novel and innovative. That emperors cross boundaries and exceed accepted degrees of imperial representation is celebrated by Neronian and Domitianic poets. We have already seen several examples of this panegyrical mode of speak-

ing, in reference to all sorts of imperial representation.[8] Poets apply different strategies to legitimize such transgressions. Domitian's construction of the *via Domitiana* for example is a transgression of nature, but a positive one (Stat. *Silv.* 4.3). Domitian is described as better and more powerful than nature (*natura melior potentiorque*, Stat. *Silv.* 4.3.135). It is pointed out that travellers profit from the new road, which reflects Domitian's care for his people (Stat. *Silv.* 4.3.20; 27–35). The construction, which involves a transgression of natural boundaries, is thus distanced from the building projects of Xerxes, Julius Caesar, Caligula, and Nero, for which they also crossed natural boundaries and in which they were evaluated as hubristic.[9] Martial exaggerates the idea of the emperor as surpassing and exceeding everything when he addresses Domitian as even surpassing himself: *ducum victor, victor et ipse tui* (Mart. 8.56.2).[10]

The motif of depicting the emperor as crossing boundaries is taken up in historiographical discourse by accepting his transgressions. They are not denied but now clearly marked as negative. As we have seen in chapter 3, imperial building endeavours, coded as successful material representations of the emperor's splendour, are re-coded as luxurious acts of destruction; the emperor's divine aura, a panegyrical sign of his crossing of human boundaries, is deconstructed by making him a low human being again. The use of power is re-coded as abuse of power, as the vice of *licentia*.[11] The motif of surpassing one's predecessors can also be turned against an emperor. Thus in the *Agricola* Domitian is depicted as worse than Nero and as crossing boundaries that even Nero had respected: Nero ordered crimes, but did not watch them; the worst thing under Domitian was that people had to watch the victims and were at the same time watched themselves (*Agr.* 45.2). The distance from Nero that the Flavians and the historical Domitian propagated is deconstructed: Domitian appears as close to Nero and, in direct comparison, as even worse.

In critical literature, moderation—as opposed to the crossing of boundaries—is considered a positive character trait. The outstanding example of *mod-*

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8 See chapter 3 and chapter 1.

9 Cf. Cordes 2017, 190–191; 193 on Stat. *Silv.* 4.3.56–60. On further strategies that legitimize the construction of the road see Cordes 2017, 189–195.

10 Cf. Domitian as *victor perpetuus* in Stat. *Silv.* 4.3.84.

11 The Tacitean Domitian is criticized for his *licentia* already in his youth (*Agr.* 7.2; cf. *nondum ad curas intentus, sed stupris et adulteriis filium principis agebat*, *Hist.* 4.2.1), and in this respect, again, contrasted to Agricola (*nec Agricola licenter, more iuvenum qui militiam in lasciviam vertunt, neque segniter ad voluptates et commeatus titulum tribunatus et inscitiam rettulit*, *Agr.* 5.1).

eratio in Tacitean literature is Agricola. Since he is contrasted to Domitian throughout the *Agricola*, his moderate behaviour provides a foil for Domitian's imperial conduct, which thereby appears even more excessive. Tacitus' father-in-law shows *moderatio* in many areas of his life. The first kind of *moderatio* we read about concerns his interest in philosophy (*Agr.* 4.3). He is first interested in philosophy "to a further extent than is allowed to a Roman and indeed a senator".[12] But reason and age assuaged him, "and yet he retained the moderation which derives from philosophy":[13] *mox mitigavit ratio et aetas, retinuitque, quod est difficillimum, ex sapientia modum* (*Agr.* 4.3). As praetor he exercises financial moderation, "a middle course consisting of *ratio* and *abundantia*" (*medio rationis atque abundantiae, Agr.* 6.4).[14] Agricola's strict moderation in self-praise, or rather his eschewal of self-praise, a third form of moderation, allows him to achieve *gloria* without *invidia* (*Agr.* 8.3). The relation of *fama* and *dissimulatio* is thus the opposite in Tacitus' Agricola and Domitian, respectively: while Domitian simulates his success (*Agr.* 39.1), Agricola tries to hide everything that might gain fame. Paradoxically, exactly this *dissimulatio* causes his fame: *sed ipsa dissimulatione famae famam auxit* (*Agr.* 18.6). The crucial element about Agricola's *dissimulatio* and *moderatio* is that it allows him to deal quite well with Domitian for a very long time. Agricola's *moderatio* together with his *prudentia* is his instrument to calm the emperor's anger (*Agr.* 42.3).

moderatio is a positive quality in both the *Annals* and the *Histories*. Tacitus' Titus becomes more moderate as *princeps*: *laetam voluptatibus adulescentiam egit, suo quam patris imperio moderatior* (*Hist.* 2.2.1). Nero's general Corbulo does not lose his sense of measure even in times of success (*quamvis secundis rebus suis, moderandum fortunae ratus, Ann.* 15.5.1), unlike his Roman opponent Paetus, who is not able to maintain moderation in his glory (*si aut gloriam cum modo aut praedam cum cura habuisset, Ann.* 15.8.2). Vologaesus at least tries to achieve a reputation for moderation (*fama moderationis quaerebatur, Ann.* 15.15.3) after indulging his pride. Even Tacitus' Tiberius often exercises *moderatio* and maintains boundaries. He is *prudens moderandi*, when he does not get carried away by his own anger (*si propria ira non impelleretur, Ann.* 3.69.5). He is able to decline honours, especially when offered by sycophants (*Ann.* 3.47.3–4; 3.59.2; 4.37.1). But, then again, his moderate behaviour is most often part of his calculation. His moderation in accepting honours for his mother Livia at the

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12 Woodman 2014, 100.
13 Woodman 2014, 102.
14 Woodman 2014, 112.

beginning of his reign is explained by his jealousy (*Ann.* 1.14.2). After her death he is said to have cancelled her honours only under the pretence of modesty (*quasi per modestiam*, *Ann.* 5.2.1). The reader is invited to think that his appeal to measure (*modus*) regarding the honours and grief for the dead Germanicus (*Ann.* 3.5–6) is also motivated by his own jealousy.[15]

The declining of honours is a special case of exhibiting *moderatio*. In panegyrical literature, emperors are applauded for not accepting them, and for not suggesting and not wanting them.[16] While panegyrical literature presents such offerings as expressions of true feelings and as merited by the modest emperor, Tacitus turns them into vain actions of sycophants or cowards, who support the emperor's false image of himself. The line between successful, moderate flattery and the ridiculous can be very thin (see e.g. *Ann.* 3.57). In Nero's reign, the senate exceeds appropriate degrees of honours right from the beginning (*apud senatum omnia in maius celebrata sunt sententiis eorum; praeter suetam adulationem*, *Ann.* 13.8.1), when Nero is still refusing silver or golden statues of himself and the notion that the calendar year should begin with the month in which he was born, December (*Ann.* 13.10.1). The honours voted to Nero after Corbulo destroyed Artaxata are explicitly said to overstep measure (*modum egressa*, *Ann.* 13.41.4). Their outrageousness is underlined, as mentioned above, by Tacitus' Gaius Cassius who remarks that there were not enough days in the whole year to be declared holidays for Nero's victory (*ne totum quidem annum supplicationibus sufficere*, *Ann.* 13.41.4).

The social system of giving and receiving honours implies an important role for the upper class. From a structural viewpoint the interplay between the senators, who offer honours, and the emperors, who accept or decline them, is prominent. This interplay is of different interest and is differently evaluated in the critical texts on Nero and Domitian.[17] Tacitus clearly takes an interest in both parties involved, not only in the emperor, since he openly blames the senators too for the immoderate offers of honours.[18] This most import-

15 Cf. *Ann.* 2.83.1–4 on honours for Germanicus, which, by contrast, are not criticized, but implicitly treated as appropriate by the narrator.

16 Cf. Mause 1994, 211 on Statius describing Domitian's *pudor*, *moderatio*, and *modestia* in rejecting public honours.

17 For Cassius Dio see p.185; 240–241, for Suetonius see p.286.

18 Tacitus hence also deconstructs the image of the Neronian and Domitianic senate, and not just that of the emperors. The senate is not depicted as blameless for the events, since the senators, for example, exceed appropriate degrees of honours and accept that rewards for the emperor do not need a foundation in reality (see p.127–128). For criticism of the senate, in addition to the passages mentioned above, see *Agr.* 45.1; *Hist.* 1.4.3; *Ann.* 14.11.2; 14.49.2; 14.60.1.

antly concerns incidents in which the public not only praises Nero's good or neutral deeds too much, but in which they even praise his misdeeds and crimes. Public prayers (*supplicationes*) and other honours are decreed after the murder of Agrippina (*Ann.* 14.12.1) and the murders of Plautus and Sulla (*Ann.* 14.59.4). Talking about the offerings for the temples that were decreed after Octavia's murder, the Tacitean narrator makes his purpose of mentioning these events explicit (*quem ad finem memorabimus?*): everyone should know that whenever the emperor ordered exile or murder, the gods were thanked; the former indicators of happy events had thus become those of public disaster (*Ann.* 14.64.3). The Tacitean narrator confirms that he will not be silent about a senatorial decree that was new in its flattery or extreme in its submissiveness (*Ann.* 14.64.3). This pattern is augmented once more in the depiction of people's actions after the cruel end of the Pisonian conspiracy. While the city was filled with funerals and the Capitol with victims, and after one person had lost his father, the other his brother, relative, or friend, people thanked the gods, decorated Nero's palace with laurel, fell at his knees and kissed his hands (*Ann.* 15.71.1). The narrator also mentions Nero's reaction, of misinterpreting this as joy (*ille gaudium id credens*, *Ann.* 15.71.1). Insincere honours, we are to learn here, support the emperor in thinking that he is acting correctly and in his incorrect interpretation of his surroundings. Likewise, in the *Agricola* flatterers are implicitly criticized for blinding and corrupting Domitian's mind (*tam caeca et corrupta mens assiduis adulationibus erat*, *Agr.* 43.3).

2.3 *Narrative Performance of Gender and Ethnicity*

At the centre of the third strategy of deconstructing imperial representation by negative connotations are concepts of gender and ethnicity. Something the emperor does or creates can be criticized by connoting it as unmanly or un-Roman, two attributes that are closely connected in criticizing a Roman man in ancient texts and in modern theory: since Michel Foucault, gender has been analysed in relation to power, discussing issues of control, (male) dominance, and (female) subordination. The Roman emperor stands at the top of Rome's patriarchal society. Historiographical deconstruction calls this leading role into question by describing emperors as crossing boundaries and defying norms of masculinity and Romanness.[19]

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19 For Tacitean values and norms in general see Vielberg 1987, who analyses the notions of *adulatio*, *servitium*/*servitus*, *obsequium*, *moderatio*/*modestia*, *libertas*, *contumacia* in Tacitus.

The topic of gender in Tacitus has been discussed by Thomas Späth.[20] He focuses on what he calls 'narrative performance' of gender. By that term he means the depiction of actions of both male and female figures in the narrative of a text that refers to and is based on actions by men and women in real social settings.[21] Späth analyses the elements of normative masculinity and normative femininity in Tacitean texts. He points out that no figure in the text is uniformly masculine or feminine according to these norms and that there is not just one concept of masculinity. However, a basic definition of masculinity and femininity provides a useful heuristic tool for analysing the behaviour of Tacitus' figures. The most important feature of normative masculinity in Tacitus is, following Späth, active dominance both over other people and over oneself.[22] It is best embodied in the Roman *pater familias* and manifests itself in three modes of action towards his subordinates: the *pater familias* exercises control over them, has to take care of them, and can make use of them for the purposes of the family (e.g. by arranging marriages). His behaviour aims for continuity and social prestige in his *domus* and his offspring. In this sense, the *princeps*, as *pater* who has power over the other *patres*, can be considered as a kind of "super-pater".[23]

While a Tacitean man has to acquire masculinity by learning, femininity is inherent to women by nature.[24] To analyse patterns of femininity in Tacitus, Späth draws on a passage presenting two speeches in the senate about whether magistrates should be allowed to take their wives with them to the provinces.[25] This passage is illuminating since both speakers, although presenting contrary opinions on the question under debate, nonetheless base their arguments on the same (commonplace) assumptions about femininity: women are weak by nature, inclined to extravagance, fear, and sensuality, they are unsuited to hardship, are ruthless, self-seeking, and greedy, and so they have to be controlled (*Ann.* 3.33–34). The passage illustrates how the concept of femininity in Tacitus entails subordination under the control, care, and instrumentalization of the

20 He partly distances himself from his PhD dissertation (Späth 1994) in later articles (Späth 2011, 124 n. 8; Späth 2011, 130 n. 38).

21 See Späth 2011, 122–123; 154–155.

22 See Späth 2011, 130–136; Späth 2012, 435–438.

23 Späth 1994, 344. See Späth 1994, 339–346, on the relationship of the *princeps* to the senators: Späth analyses the role of the *princeps* as "super-pater" as a way to de-masculinize the senators.

24 Späth 2011, 139 speaks of femininity in Tacitean texts as a "descriptive determination" instead of a "prescriptive norm".

25 See Späth 2011, 140–141; Späth 2012, 441–442.

pater familias; it furthermore considers fidelity and fertility to be the most important traits of women.[26]

Tacitus depicts emperors in a way that shows them transgressing these patterns and failing to fulfil these norms of masculinity.[27] Nero and Domitian are both 'unmanly', but in different ways.[28] Neither the historical Nero nor the historical Domitian could fulfil their masculine duties of producing offspring and securing the continuity of their *domus*. They also failed to enlarge its social prestige. But the deconstruction of masculinity in the Tacitean texts turns out to be quite individual for each emperor.

Nero is often depicted as not in control of himself, but as being influenced by Seneca and Burrus, by Agrippina, Acte, and Poppaea (*Ann.* 13.6.2; 13.12.2; 14.1–12).[29] Especially his dependence on his mother is problematized and presented as troubling the public at the beginning of his reign (*quod subsidium in eo, qui a femina regeretur, … anquirebant*, *Ann.* 13.6.2). Even more unmanly than the control imposed on him by other people is the fact that the Tacitean Nero enjoys giving away control himself. He even organizes performances that show him losing control. His performances as artist are explicitly characterized as unmanly (*haud viriles*, *Ann.* 14.15.1).[30] Another, very special performance, in which Nero even plays himself and not just the role of someone else, is his marriage to Pythagoras (*Ann.* 15.37.4): in this ceremony, Nero is the bride married to the freedman Pythagoras. The marriage is presented as the only remaining transgression possible after the city orgy organized by Tigellinus.[31] It is also linked to that orgy through the figures of the narrative because Pythagoras is said to have been present there too. The narrator points out that it was a formal wedding ceremony involving the bridal veil—worn by the emperor Nero—, augurs, dowry, marriage bed, and wedding torches (*inditum imperatori flammeum, missi auspices; dos et genialis torus et faces nuptiales*, *Ann.*

26 See Späth 2011, 142–144; Späth 2012, 442–443.

27 I do not distinguish as clearly as Späth does in his analysis (Späth 2012, 443) between 'unmanliness' (referring to the status of a man who does not acquire masculinity) and 'femininity' (the natural status of all women), because in the process of deconstruction the category of 'not manly' entails both aspects and plays on the closeness of the man who is 'unmanly' (in Späth's terms) to naturally 'feminine' women.

28 Späth 2011, 134 (see also Späth 2012, 438) briefly mentions Nero's lack of self-restraint in the forms of his greed and luxury.

29 Dependence on women (and freedmen) is also one of the standard reproaches against Claudius (e.g. *Ann.* 11.29; 12.1).

30 For the association of actors with femininity see Woodman 1993, 124 on *effeminatus* characterizing actors.

31 Cf. the close reading of this passage on p.71–72, and p.125–126.

15.37.4).[32] Here again, Nero's transgression is depicted as the transgression of a transgression: even if this had been a regular wedding with a female bride, the narrator points out, these things would have been hidden (*cuncta denique spectata, quae etiam in femina nox operit, Ann.* 15.37.4).[33] That the bride is male—and what is more: the emperor—doubles and triples the transgression.[34] Scholarship has proposed that Nero's historical performance of this marriage was meant as tactical mockery and as a joke about an important Roman ritual, or that it was a 'mystic' marriage connected to Mithraic ceremonies.[35] Had this really been the case, Tacitus would, of course, not have felt obliged to explain the background of Nero's performance, even if he were aware of it and understood it himself.[36] However, that must remain only a thought-experiment, since we cannot know what Nero really meant, nor how the senators and later Tacitus understood it. But it would be in accord with the strategies Tacitus applies throughout, if he considered it more effective for the deconstruction of imperial representation not to give any explanation of Nero's behaviour, instead of making an explicit link between Nero's wedding and a real ritual.[37] This way, the text leaves the reader with the impression of an emperor who indulges his completely unmanly (immoral and un-Roman) role.

Domitian is not depicted as unmanly in these Neronian terms in Tacitus.[38] He does have control over himself and his subordinates. But this control is characterized as overdone. As outlined above, the *princeps* as *pater* of the *patres* also has to take care of his subjects. The Tacitean *princeps* Domitian, whom we can grasp in the *Agricola*, is a master of control both of his own emotions (*Agr.* 39.1; 39.3; 42.3; 43.3) and, thanks to his system of spies (*Agr.* 2.3), of his citizens. But the text constructs his envy of others as the reason for this control (*Agr.*

32 While Tacitus' focus is on the ceremony, Suetonius' interest in the wedding with Pythagoras, whom he calls Doryphorus, is more on sexuality. See Späth 2011, 135 and p.289.

33 For the series of transgressions in the whole passage see p.125–126.

34 Criticism of Nero in the *Octavia* works similarly. He is e.g. reproached for 'doubling' the matricide, with the attack on Agrippina's ship followed by stabbing her; see Cordes 2017, 218–219 on *ingens geminatque nefas* (*Oct.* 363); *ingens scelere geminavit nefas* (*Oct.* 605).

35 Allen 1962, 104–107, analyses similarities with Mithraic initiation.

36 This is the view of Miller 1973, 87, who calls into question the historical connection between Nero's wedding performance and a religious rite such as a festival of Flora or a Mithraic ceremony: "It is not impossible, given Nero's temperament and interests: but it is strange that neither Tacitus nor Suetonius (Nero 28–9) makes such a connection: following a strange ritual would have made another charge."

37 See p.114.

38 But see Domitian's description as effeminate in Plin. *Pan.* 48.4 (*femineus pallor in corpore*).

39.1–2). Its result is a system that suppresses virtues and creates fear (*Agr.* 3.1; 41.1). In Tacitus, Domitian's control thus contradicts his masculine duty to care for his people.

The Tacitean texts often connect un-manliness with un-Romanness.[39] Foreign things are generally presented as suspicious and threatening.[40] A Roman emperor or representative of the imperial *domus* has to behave in a Roman way.[41] Nero's artistry is understood both as foreign, especially Greek, and as not masculine: the arguments presented against Nero's *Neronia* games draw on their effeminate and un-Roman character (*ceterum abolitos paulatim patrios mores funditus everti per accitam lasciviam*, *Ann.* 14.20.4; *degeneretque studiis externis iuventus*, *Ann.* 14.20.4; *fractos sonos et dulcedinem vocum*, *Ann.* 14.20.5). For his first public performance Nero is shown as deliberately choosing a Greek city, Naples (*Ann.* 15.33.2). His behaviour is influenced by Greek ideas (*Ann.* 14.47.2), which entail new and un-Roman social ideals and virtues.[42] More un-Roman elements in his imperial representation can be found: during the Pisonian conspiracy Tacitus' Nero trusts the Germans more than the Romans (*Germanis, quibus fidebat princeps quasi externis*, *Ann.* 15.58.2). Poppaea's funeral is described as foreign and un-Roman (*regum externorum consuetudine*, *Ann.* 16.6.2). The banquet of Tigellinus (*Ann.* 15.37.1–3), too, includes several elements that point to Nero's un-Roman-

39 Since Späth himself points out that the performance of gender both in texts and in reality is always intertwined with other social roles such as political position or juridical status (see Späth 2011, 123; 139)—a phenomenon which he refers to as "intersectorial performance" (Späth 2011, 144)—I am expanding his concept of 'narrative performance of gender' here to 'narrative performance of gender and ethnicity'. For the modern connection between sexism and racism see Späth 1994, 16. For the connection of un-manliness and un-Romanness in Tacitus' account of the campaigns in Britain see Roberts 1988, esp. 121–124.

40 See for example the accusation of Pomponia Graecina as *superstitionis externae rea* (*Ann.* 13.32.2) and the speech against (foreign) slaves in *Ann.* 14.44.3 (*postquam vero nationes in familiis habemus, quibus diversi ritus, externa sacra aut nulla sunt, conluviem istam non nisi metu coercueris*, "but since now we have in our households tribes of foreigners who have different rites, and alien religions, or no religion at all, you will not hold scum like that in check except by intimidation").

41 This is why Tiberius criticizes (although in lenient terms) Germanicus' un-Roman clothes and habits in Alexandria (*cultu habituque eius lenibus verbis perstricto*, *Ann.* 2.59.2). The incestuous marriage of Claudius and Agrippina has to be legitimated by referring to other nations (*at enim nova nobis in fratrum filias coniugia: sed aliis gentibus sollemnia, neque lege ulla prohibita*, *Ann.* 12.6.3).

42 For the new, Greek point of reference for Nero's values (especially as regards his representation as artist) as a problem for the Roman upper classes see Winterling 2007, 130; Mratschek 2013, 45–47; 50–51; 53–56.

ness.[43] Anthony Woodman has analysed the city orgy and its traits of foreignness, animalism, decadence, and perversion.[44] He argues that Tacitus aims to depict Rome as a foreign, alien place, and that Tacitus' Nero finally creates a metonymic Alexandria and can be understood as the attacker of Rome.

Throughout the *Annals*, these descriptions of emperors as unmanly and un-Roman become more effective by contrasting them to women who behave in a more manly way than men, and foreigners who act more Roman than the Romans themselves.[45] Agrippina the Elder provides an example of this gender-untypical behaviour.[46] She transgresses female norms: yearning for power (*dominandi avida*) she casts off female weaknesses and turns to the tasks of a man (*virilibus curis feminarum vitia exuerat*) (*Ann.* 6.25.2). Tacitus' Nero is surrounded by similarly contrasting figures. Such a constellation increases the dramatic effect of depicting a man and a woman as antagonists.[47] There are foreigners who do not want to be ruled by Agrippina, a woman (*inde accensi hostes, stimulante ignominia, ne feminae imperio subderentur*, *Ann.* 12.40.3), and who are thinking and feeling in a very Roman way. Germanic foreigners behave unconventionally, but also with such a spirit of freedom that Nero grants them Roman citizenship (*Ann.* 13.54.4). Indeed, especially the 'barbarian other' may be depicted in very positive terms. In general, this notion is best illustrated by the *Germania*, often read as a *Sittenspiegel* to Roman society.[48] But there are

43 Cf., again, the close reading of this passage on p.71–72.

44 Woodman 1998 starts his analysis from the events preceding the banquet of Tigellinus in the text: Nero does not leave Rome, but stays there, though his thoughts are occupied with the East and Egypt (*Ann.* 15.36.1). Woodman reads the banquet as a realization of these thoughts and of Nero's wish to turn Rome into a foreign city because he could not leave it.

45 The contrast between Romans and foreigners also pertains to their willingness to invent things and believe them, to the dynamic of *fingere* and *credere*, as Haynes puts it (Haynes 2003, 13): "In his articulation of make/believe, Tacitus often compares or mirrors the Roman situation with that of foreigners." Roberts 1988, 130–131 shows that the outspokenness of foreigners, women (and old people) often contrasts with the doublespeak of imperial Rome.

46 Cf. Späth's analysis of Agrippina the Elder in Späth 2011, 150–151; Späth 2012, 447–448.

47 For the dramatic tension between different genders see Billerbeck 1991, 2768, referring to the pairs Claudius and Messalina, and Nero and Agrippina as examples: "Wie bereits bemerkt, nimmt bei Tacitus die dramatische Spannung zu, wo echte Gegenspieler—vorzugsweise Mann und Frau—agieren."

48 A reading of the *Germania* as a *Sittenspiegel*, however, requires a differentiation: sometimes the *Germani* represent Roman virtues better than the Romans themselves, sometimes they take Roman values to unacceptable degrees (e.g. military valour), and sometimes they represent the opposite of a Roman value (e.g. regarding their lack of discipline). See Rives 2012, 50–52.

also examples in the *Annals*, such as Arminius (e.g. *Ann.* 1.57). In particular, Boudicca and Epicharis stand out. The British queen Boudicca is both a woman and a foreigner, yet is still appreciated in her role by the narrator (*Ann.* 14.35; 14.37; *femina duce*, *Agr.* 16.1).[49] And in the aftermath of the Pisonian conspiracy Epicharis, a freedwoman, stands out and incorporates male virtues better than any of the disappointing men in the story.[50]

The concept of Romanness presupposes a distinction between Rome and not-Rome, in which Rome is superior to the rest of the world and the rest of the world admires Rome for it. Such a concept implies that Rome should be presented as superior to visiting foreigners or even to provincials who do not live in the city. In Tacitus' narrative, Nero does not achieve this. It is his general Corbulo who cares about what foreigners see and witness and what they should not witness (*ne diutius externis spectaculo esset*, *Ann.* 13.9.2). Later, when Vologaesus asks for his brother Tiridates honours in Rome as high as those of consuls, Tacitus interprets this demand as foreign arrogance to which Vologaesus is accustomed, and ascribes it to his ignorance of the Romans (*externae superbiae sueto non inerat notitia nostri*, *Ann.* 15.31). For the Romans, so Tacitus, only real power is vigorous, whereas mere vanities are disregarded (*apud quos vis imperii valet, inania tramittuntur*, *Ann.* 15.31). Tacitus may be referring mainly to his own times (*nostri*), the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, and may in fact mean what he says. But the sentence praising true power and the neglect of vanities, embedded in the Neronian narrative, seems ironic. Introduced by *scilicet*, it invites the reader to think exactly the opposite, at least for Neronian times: the foreigner Vologaesus is not familiar with Roman standards because they do not exist anymore.

Not only the depiction of non-Romans and Rome, but, to move on to another device of deconstruction, also the relationship between Roman provincials—foreigners to the city of Rome—and Rome is used to deconstruct imperial representation. The description of the audience's reaction to Nero's performances at the *Neronia* in 65 CE makes a sharp distinction between the people of Rome itself and the rest. On the one side there is the *plebs urbis*, accustomed to support the gestures even of actors, which makes the theatre resound with

49 While Boudicca is presented as legitimizing her male actions in her speech (*solitum quidem Britannis feminarum ductu bellare testabatur*, *Ann.* 14.35.1; *id mulieri destinatum: viverent viri et servirent*, *Ann.* 14.35.2), the Roman general Suetonius in his speech to the troops claims that the Britons are mainly women (*plus illic feminarum quam iuventutis adspici*, *Ann.* 14.36.1). On Boudicca's speech (as focusing on the problems of Roman expansionism) and Tacitus' portrait of Boudicca see also Adler 2008, 179–184; 194.

50 Cf. Späth 2011, 151–154; Späth 2012, 448–450. See also p.151 on the disconcerting effect of the figure of Epicharis.

its orchestrated applause (*certis modis plausuque composito*, *Ann.* 16.4.4). One might think, Tacitus remarks, that they were happy, and perhaps they really were happy, since they did not care about the public disgrace (*per incuriam publici flagitii*, *Ann.* 16.4.4).[51] The very different behaviour of the rest of the audience is introduced by *sed* (*Ann.* 16.5.1). The non-urban Romans are presented as a distinct group consisting of those from the distant free towns and from an Italy which was still strict and adhered to the old moral code, as well as those who had come from faraway provinces as legates or for private business, who had no experience of wantonness (*qui remotis e municipiis severaque adhuc et antiqui moris retinente Italia, quique per longinquas provincias lascivia inexperti officio legationum aut privata utilitate advenerant*, *Ann.* 16.5.1). All these people cannot endure this sight (*neque adspectum illum tolerare*) and they cannot meet the demand for the degrading task of rhythmic clapping (*Ann.* 16.5.1). Disturbing the others by their unpractised incorrect clapping, they get punished by soldiers standing amongst the blocks (*Ann.* 16.5.1). The centre of Rome appears un-Roman to those not from Rome. Those who behave according to the old manners of Rome get punished.

This passage can be read as deconstructing Neronian bucolic panegyrics. In Calpurnius Siculus' *Ecloga 7* Corydon comes back from the city to the countryside. He reports his experience of Neronian Rome, especially Nero's theatre (Calp. *Ecl.* 7.36–38; 47–72). The positive impression on him was so strong that he now considers the countryside to be inferior to Nero's city of Rome (Calp. *Ecl.* 7.4–7; 15–18). Carole Newlands has read this eclogue as a reversal of bucolic values.[52] In bucolic literature, shepherds and countrymen usually praise the country as superior to the city, either in general terms or through their own experience. Neronian panegyrics instead show a shepherd praising the city. As Tacitus picks up the distinction and evaluation of city and country, we can understand Tacitus' account of the *Neronia* (*Ann.* 16.4–5) as part of the same discourse. In deconstructing the panegyrical idea of the countryman who prefers the city, Tacitus' text mirrors the 'original' bucolic idea of the superiority of the country where people have not yet experienced urban *lascivia*. But this notion is transferred into the space of the city. The reader is given a description of the reaction of countrymen to the city in the city itself, which brings across the point that Rome has become a foreign city to the Romans living outside of it. Morals have degenerated to the point that the situation can only be grasped by outsiders, and no longer by insiders. Rome is not itself anymore.

51 Cf. p.69–70 for negative depictions of the people as a means to deconstruct Nero's popularity with the lower classes.

52 See Newlands 1987, 220–223; 228; 288.

3 Causation and Character

3.1 *The Emperor's Reasoning: The Sterile Octavia's Abortion*

While the previous section has focused on how an emperor's deeds are depicted as negative by means of unfavourable connotations, this section deals with the deconstruction of an emperor's motives for his acts and behaviour. A historical emperor and a Tacitean emperor act and behave on certain grounds. They may explain them themselves, give 'official reasons' for their behaviour, or the reasons for their acts and behaviour may be explained by someone else. Such reasons behind an emperor's deeds and imperial representation offer a fruitful topic for deconstruction.

The explanation of reasons is an important part of the communication process between the *princeps* and his people. The principate in the form established by Augustus was based on a *princeps* who had absolute power in fact, but who would not openly communicate this.[53] The senators are, at least officially, supposed to take part in his decisions, and the *princeps* is expected to communicate the reasons and purposes of his actions. This kind of communication allows the senators to feel they are an important element of imperial politics. Historiographical discourse deals with the emperor's reasons, the way he presents them to his subjects, and the way they react to them. It deconstructs the emperor's reasons by unmasking them, either explicitly or implicitly, as implausible, inappropriate, personal, or vain. The depiction of how such reasons are received unmasks the whole system of communication as farce.

A passage which exhibits several strategies for deconstructing the emperor's reasons is the downfall of Octavia (*Ann.* 14.60–64). The presentation of the emperor's reasons and reasoning in this episode can be considered typical of the process of deconstruction. The most important characteristic of the deconstructed reasons of the emperor is that they lack a *fundamentum in re*: his grounds are presented as merely invented, as we will see.[54] That Nero put away Octavia is introduced as a reaction to the senators' acceptance and positive appraisal of all his crimes: *igitur accepto patrum consulto, postquam cuncta scelerum suorum pro egregiis accipi videt, exturbat Octaviam* (*Ann.* 14.60.1). He drives his wife out, asserting that she is barren (*sterilem dictitans, Ann.* 14.60.1). In the narrative, this official reason for Octavia's fall is directly followed by a new action: Nero marries Poppaea. The connection made by the text is only

53 Cf. p.15.

54 Tiberius, too, when he wants to get rid of Germanicus by sending him away to the East, invents reasons for doing so or adopts reasons that are offered to him by chance (*struxitque causas aut forte oblatas arripuit, Ann.* 2.42.1).

a temporal one, given by the adverb *exim* (*Ann.* 14.60.1). But the direct juxtaposition implies a logical link too.[55] We are led to think that Nero has expelled Octavia precisely because he wants to marry Poppaea. Prompting the reader to reach this conclusion independently may be more effective than simply stating the logical link.[56] The official reason, her sterility, will thus be doubted already at this point in the narrative.

What follows proves this assumption. Poppaea is depicted as Nero's mistress and in full control of him. She plans and carries out a plot against Octavia, who finds herself falsely accused of an affair with the slave Eucaerus (*Ann.* 14.60.2). This reproach is not only said directly by the narrator to be incorrect (*falsa*, *Ann.* 14.60.3); it is also completely at odds with the former characterizations of Nero's wife as noble, upright, and virtuous (e.g. *uxore ab Octavia, nobili quidem et probitatis spectatae*, *Ann.* 13.12.2). Octavia is first removed under the pretext of a civil divorce (*civilis discidii specie*), then banished to Campania and put under military guard (*Ann.* 14.60.4). Since the people of Rome, prompted by a rumour that Nero had recalled Octavia to the marriage, openly show their support for her and their hatred for Poppaea, the latter initiates the final stroke against Octavia (*Ann.* 14.61). Nero believes Poppaea's false reasoning that Octavia may lead a revolution against him (*Ann.* 14.61.3). Playing on Nero's fear and anger Poppaea makes him accuse Octavia of an affair and of treason planned together with Anicetus, who had already helped murder Agrippina (*Ann.* 14.62). Nero's edict summarizes the false charges against Octavia: she is said to have seduced the prefect in the hope that she could win over the fleet (*praefectum in spem sociandae classis corruptum*, *Ann.* 14.63.1). These are charges that the reader already knows. The reasons for Nero's edict are now complemented by a third reason, which is new to the reader: *et incusatae paulo ante sterilitatis oblitus, abactos partus conscientia libidinum* (*Ann.* 14.63.1). Nero accuses Octavia of an abortion, which she had conducted in consciousness of her sexual excesses. This third reason is introduced by an explicit reminder to the reader that Nero thereby forgot that he had shortly before accused her of barrenness. Octavia is removed further away, to Pandateria, where she is finally killed (*Ann.* 14.64).

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55 Cf. similarly Heldmann 2013, 324 on *Ann.* 16.6.1.

56 I disagree with Hausmann, who argues that the reason why Tacitus mentions these causal connections indirectly is because the conclusions he nudges the reader to draw are not absolutely in accord with the historical facts and therefore cannot be openly presented by a truthful historian (for this position see Hausmann 2012, 143: the reader is guided to conclusions, "die oftmals den historischen Fakten nicht gerecht werden und daher von Tacitus als einem gewissenhaften Historiker nicht offen geäußert werden dürfen").

In this passage, Tacitus' Nero invents reasons (Octavia's sterility and affair), believes Poppaea's false reasons (Octavia's alleged plans for a revolution), and does not succeed in producing a coherent version of events because the reasons he invents contradict each other (Octavia's sterility and abortion).[57] But the system of communication as depicted allows the emperor not to care about the plausibility of his arguments. In the Neronian narrative, we can see that the emperor puts less and less emphasis on the plausibility of his motives when explaining what he does, especially regarding the murders he is responsible for. When he has Plautus and Sulla[58] killed (*Ann.* 14.57–59), he no longer even tries to cover up his guilt, as he did with Agrippina. Although he does not admit that he had them murdered (*sed ad senatum litteras misit de caede Sullae Plautique haud confessus*, *Ann.* 14.59.4), he points to their disordered character (*utriusque turbidum ingenium*) and to his own great care for the safety of the state (*Ann.* 14.59.4)—which may be understood as reasons for the murder. When the Tacitean Nero wants to remove C. Cassius and Silanus, the narrator first makes it clear that there was no charge against them (*nullo crimine*, *Ann.* 16.7.1). The reasons Nero presents later—plans for starting a civil war, treason, and revolution (*Ann.* 16.7.2)—are thus not to be believed by the reader, and (at least for Silanus) are explicitly evaluated as *inania simul et falsa* (*Ann.* 16.8.1).

If we think of these reasons, clearly marked as implausible by the narrator, in terms of a communication process, someone has to react to them. So the historian also considers the interplay between the emperor's reasoning and the people who have to address these reasons, to believe them, and to be persuaded by them. After the murder of Plautus and Sulla and Nero's expression of care for the state, the senators decree thank offerings and the removal of Sulla and Plautus from the senate. Tacitus calls this a farce that is worse than the wrongdoings themselves (*gravioribus iam ludibriis quam malis*, *Ann.* 14.59.4). Criticism of the addressees of Nero's reasons is also explicit after the murder of Agrippina. Nero's invented reproaches are far-fetched (*crimina longius repetita*), and no one could believe the reasons that Nero presented for Agrippina's death, as the narrator points out in a rhetorical question: *quis adeo hebes inveniretur, ut cre-*

57 For the connection of lying and remembering cf. Quintilian, who advises the orator to remember what he has invented for his speech, since one easily forgets this; he also cites a saying among the people that the liar has to have a good memory (*verumque est illud quod vulgo dicitur, mendacem memorem esse oportere*, Quint. *Inst.* 4.2.21).

58 In the *Octavia*, Seneca tries—unsuccessfully—to keep Nero from murdering Plautus and Sulla (*Oct.* 440–471). In the end, Nero wants to kill not only Plautus and Sulla, but also his wife Octavia (*invisa coniunx pereat*, *Oct.* 470).

deret? (*Ann.* 14.11.2). But still—and the logical connection is clearly marked by the adversative *tamen* here—the notables (except Thrasea Paetus) decree public prayers in an astonishing decision-making contest: *miro tamen certamine procerum decernuntur supplicationes apud omnia pulvinaria* (*Ann.* 14.12.1). No one admits that they know that the reasons presented by the emperor are not the true ones.[59] This kind of behaviour even allows Nero to legitimize the punishment of Antistius in a treason trial by saying that this is what the senators wanted (*Ann.* 14.49.2). Tacitus makes the addressees of the emperor's reasons to a certain extent accountable for the fact that the emperor did not need to care about their plausibility and quality.

3.2 *Reasons for the Emperor's Behaviour*

From the reasons that Tacitus' emperors themselves give for their imperial actions we can distinguish the reasons that the narrator gives for their actions. In the first case, the reasons presented by the emperors are both the object and the means of deconstruction: a reason that the emperor presents for a certain deed can code this very act negatively. In the second case, reasons given by the narrator, which explain imperial behaviour from an outside point of view, are merely a means of deconstruction. Ascribing a certain motivation to an imperial behaviour may be aimed at its direct critique. It may also contradict an 'official' reason presented by the emperor. There is a lot of variation in the ways that such authorial reasons for behaviour are presented in the text. We can distinguish three grades: first, reasons for imperial behaviour may be given directly by the narrator; second, reasons may be suggested or hinted at by the narrator or one of his characters; third, reasons may be markedly absent from the text.

(1) The reasons that the narrator gives for imperial behaviour sometimes refute an official version of the events under discussion. The historian, who allegedly knows the real motives as opposed to those that the emperor presents, makes the reader distrust the reasons the emperor himself provides. The official version differs from the narrator's true reason, for example, in the case of the death of Torquatus Silanus. We are told that Nero has Torquatus Silanus kill himself because of his noble descent, which includes Augustus as his great-grandfather (*quia super Iuniae familiae claritudinem divum Augustum abavum ferebat*, *Ann.* 15.35.1). Silanus' accusers are ordered to give another reason, namely that he was prodigal in his largess and that his only hope was

59 See also *Ann.* 14.11.2–3: no one believes Nero's offical version of Agrippina's death, given in a letter that Seneca writes for him.

revolution (*iussi accusatores obicere prodigum largitionibus, neque aliam spem quam in rebus novis esse, Ann.* 15.35.2).[60]

The revelation of the 'true' reasons may characterize as absurd the relationship of an act and its reason or purpose. Panegyrical literature uses this technique of a reason seemingly incompatible with the form of imperial representation in order to praise the emperor: when the first *Carmen Einsidlense* alludes to Nero's *Troica* it claims that the fall of Troy was worthwhile because otherwise Nero could not have sung of it: *iam tanti cecidisse fuit! gaudete ruinae / et laudate rogos: vester vos tollit alumnus* ("Now has it proved of such value to have fallen! Rejoice, ruins, and praise your funeral pyres: it is your nursling that raises you again!", *Carm. Einsidl.* 1.40–41). In Tacitus, Nero's political decisions are sometimes described as motivated by reasons that should have nothing to do with them. A certain action and a reason presented for it are incompatible in a negative way. Thus Paris escapes punishment because Nero needs him for his excesses (*validiore apud libidines principis Paride, quam ut poena adficeretur, Ann.* 13.22.2). Rotten crops are thrown into the Tiber to make people think that the grain supply is safe and to divert them from worries about foreign politics (*quin et dissimulandis rerum externarum curis, Ann.* 15.18.2). Tiridates is only a diversion from internal evil (*ut ⟨versis⟩ ad externa rumoribus intestinum scelus obscuraretur, Ann.* 16.23.2). When Nero asks the senators for help after the death of Britannicus he gives as reason that he has lost his brother's help (*sibi amisso fratris auxilio, Ann.* 13.17.3). True as this may be, the reason for his loss is, as everyone in the narrative knows, that he himself killed Britannicus. It also seems absurd that Nero wants to spare Seneca's wife because he does not want to appear too cruel (*ne glisceret invidia crudelitatis, Ann.* 15.64.1).[61]

60 This strategy of stating an allegedly real reason opposed to an official one is also common in the Tiberius narrative. The real reason why Tiberius sends Germanicus to the East, for example, is reputedly not the uprisings there. These are only a pretext (*ea specie*); the true reason, or purpose, the narrator states, is to take Germanicus away from his accustomed legions and to expose him to the treachery and vagaries of fortune in a new province (*Ann.* 2.5.1). Similarly, the dedication of a temple of Jupiter in Capua and a temple of Augustus in Nola is only the pretext (*specie dedicandi templa*) for Tiberius' move to Campania, so the narrator (*Ann.* 4.57.1). The true reason was that he was determined to live far from the city (*sed certus procul urbe degere, Ann.* 4.57.1). Tacitus here reflects on his investigation into Tiberius' reasons for leaving Rome (*causam abscessus, Ann.* 4.57.1) and he finds it not only in Sejanus' activities but also inherent in the personality Tiberius, who concealed his cruelty and licentiousness, which were obvious from his deeds, at certain sites (*Ann.* 4.57.3). Tiberius' character, not the circumstances perceptible from outside, provides the true reason for his travels.

61 Cf. *Ann.* 15.73.1: Nero is tormented by the widespread rumour among the people that he had put to death famous and innocent men out of jealousy or fear (*etenim crebro vulgi rumore lacerabatur, tamquam viros ⟨claros⟩ et insontes ob invidiam aut metum extinxisset*).

(2) Such 'true' reasons, as opposed to the wrong, official reasons, are not always given so explicitly by the narrator. The narrator does not always position himself and his own opinion clearly. Instead, several reasons for imperial behaviour may be presented as possible, and may be uttered by figures in the narrative. We will come back to alternative versions and their effect on the reader later.[62] The most famous example is probably the so-called *Totengericht* about Augustus at the beginning of book 1 (*Ann.* 1.9–10). Among the negative opinions the narrator reports about the first *princeps* is one that concerns Augustus' choice of Tiberius as successor. He did not choose him, according to the people voicing criticism of Augustus, because he loved and cared for the state, but because he had understood his arrogant and savage character and was aiming to secure his own glory by the comparison with someone who was extremely bad (*Ann.* 1.10.7). Even if this possible reason for Augustus' act is not explicitly assessed as true by the narrator, it deconstructs Augustus' behaviour and influences the reader's view of him.

(3) Another strategy of deconstructing someone's deeds is to give no reason for them at all. Reasons provide context. Without the explanation of a reason or motive, actions may appear isolated and senseless. It can thus be a very effective form of critique *not* to base an action on a logical ground, or to state explicitly that no reason was given for a certain imperial action. Under Tiberius, women are arraigned because of the tears they shed (*ob lacrimas incusabantur*; … *quod filii necem flevisset*, *Ann.* 6.10.1). This can hardly have been the whole story.[63] There is for example no mention of possible and common prohibitions on mourning.[64] Presented with such brevity, the reason seems harsh and inadequate. Tacitus does not give any practical reason for Nero's canal project from the *lacus Avernus* to Ostia, and even states that there *was* no satisfactory reason and interprets Nero's building a canal as a sign of his yearning for the incredible (*nec satis causae. Nero tamen, ut erat incredibilium concupitor*, *Ann.* 15.42.2).[65] In the case of Nero's cancellation of the journey to Achaea this indication of the lack of official reasons (*causae in incerto fuere*, *Ann.* 15.36.1) invites the reader to search for them independently.

62 See p.133–147.

63 Koestermann 1965, 262, although unsure of the background of this episode regarding a certain Vitia, the mother of Fufius Geminus, concludes: "Gewiß wurde sie [sc. Vitia] nicht nur wegen ihrer Tränen getötet."

64 Cf. Woodman 2017, 131.

65 Tacitus also dismisses the practical reasons for Claudius' canal between the Fucine lake and the river Liris (*Ann.* 12.56–57). However, the criticism on the canal is not connected to the character of the emperor but to its manner of construction there (*Ann.* 12.57.1), and the building project is also described positively (*magnificentia operis*, *Ann.* 12.56.1).

3.3 *Motivation and Character*

3.3.1 Character in Tacitus

In the preceding analysis we have seen that the depiction of motivation is closely linked to the creation or negation of plausibility. To construct or deny plausibility for actions, the narrator draws on the device of characterization. For the Tacitean narrator, who wants to understand the logic and causes of history, not just the events themselves and their results, which are most often governed by chance (*ut non modo casus eventusque rerum, qui plerumque fortuiti sunt, sed ratio etiam causaeque noscantur, Hist.* 1.4.1), understanding people's characters is important, since this may explain the reasons for and the development of events.[66] Character depiction in Tacitus owes its persuasiveness to the coherence of the figures that the narrator creates, their motives, their behaviour, and the events depicted.[67] The figures thus appear authentic,[68] but their authenticity is a construct of the narrative.[69]

Before we analyse characterization as a strategy of deconstruction, we should try to understand Tacitus' concept of character in general.[70] The aspects of the Tacitean concept of character will also provide a heuristic tool for finding methods of deconstructing character in Tacitus' texts. First, a Tacitean character is formed by rational and irrational elements and their interplay.[71] On the one hand, it would be a gross simplification to say that character in Tacitus is given at birth and does not change later.[72] The idea of character development is undoubtedly sometimes present.[73] But, on the other hand, this notion of development, prominent most of all in ancient philosophy, is not fully represented in early imperial historiography and biography.[74] Secondly, Tacitus

66 Cf. Syme 1958, 521: "Like Sallust, Tacitus is not much concerned with the supernatural. The mysteries that matter lie in the hearts and behaviour of men."

67 Cf. Syme 1958, 419: "(…) the author of the *Annales* presents characters and arranges events in undue coherence."

68 I would not say that they *are* authentic, however (as Syme 1958, 535 does: "Julia Agrippina, the mother of Nero, is wholly authentic").

69 My focus is not on type-characterization in Tacitus. See Walker 1952, 204–234 on the types of the tyrant, the opportunist/the informer, the victim, the collaborator, the noble savage, the intransigent.

70 In this discussion of Tacitus' concept of character I am mainly drawing on Gill 1983.

71 Cf. Vielberg 2000, 174–180 on the emotional and cognitive parts of Tacitean *ingenium*.

72 See Gill 1983, 469; 482.

73 For a depiction of character change see *Ann.* 6.32.4 (*mutatus*) on Vitellius, father of the emperor Vitellius; for a depiction of behavioural change for the better see *Ann.* 13.46.3 on Otho (*sed integre sancteque egit*).

74 See Gill 1983, 476. In philosophy, character development depends to a significant extent

considers character as something "relatively fixed".[75] An important part in character development is played, thirdly, by upbringing, and the influence of individuals and of society, especially in youth, which is conceived of as *lubrica aetas*.[76] The character of an adult is a product both of external influences and of innate qualities.[77] Yet, we should not confuse change in character with the taking up of different roles, an important part of Roman character, which is also depicted in the texts. It is a typical Roman notion that throughout their lives people wear masks, play roles.[78] Agricola, for example, is said to know how to distinguish between his official duties or work and his free time (*tempora curarum remissionumque divisa*, *Agr.* 9.3): in his free time, he no longer wears the mask of his official power (*nulla ultra potestatis persona*, *Agr.* 9.3).

A Tacitean character is presented as playing such roles and displaying good and bad qualities. Tacitus is more interested in evaluating, i.e. praising and blaming, a person's moral qualities, an approach that Christopher Gill calls "character-viewpoint", than in understanding and explaining the person in an ethically neutral way, which Gill calls "personality-viewpoint".[79] This interest arises from the historian's task, namely providing moral examples for the reader (*quod praecipuum munus annalium reor ne virtutes sileantur utque pravis dictis factisque ex posteritate et infamia metus sit*, *Ann.* 3.65.1; cf. *Ann.* 14.64.3; *Hist.* 1.3.1). For this sort of moral judgement, the examination of characters, including the emperors', is considered useful (*Ann.* 4.33.2).

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on the person him- or herself, and the transition from childhood to adulthood is regarded as a critical stage in this development, see Gill 1983, 470.

75 Gill 1983, 473. Cf. Gill 1983, 477: "a relatively static picture of a person's character". Cf. also Döpp 1985, 166 in his analysis of Domitian's character in Tacitus' *Agricola* on "Tacitus' Auffassung, daß der Charakter eines Menschen derselbe bleibt, mag sich auch sein Verhalten wandeln".

76 See Gill 1983, 476.

77 See Gill 1983, 475, referring to Roman historians in general.

78 Vielberg 2000, 189 points to this Roman element in Tacitus' concept of character and refers to Suet. *Aug.* 99 (*mimum vitae commode transegisse*, "he had played his role well in the comedy of life"), mentioned above, and to Lucr. 3.57–58 (*nam verae voces tum demum pectore ab imo / eliciuntur, et eripitur persona: manet res*, "for only then are the words of truth called forth deep from the heart, and the mask is torn off: the reality remains").

79 In this passage I am drawing on Gill 1983, 471–473: Tacitus shares the character-viewpoint with the historiography of the late Republic and early Roman Empire and with ancient biography, whereas modern biography adapts a personality-viewpoint. However, with regard to Tacitus, Gill's distinction between the two concepts is exaggerated. Although Tacitus' main purpose is to evaluate moral qualities, he also wants to understand and explain his characters (which Gill defines as typical of the 'personality-view'), although Tacitus admittedly does not do so in an ethically neutral way.

The character that has received most attention in Tacitean scholarship is that of Tiberius, who may help to exemplify the concept of character just outlined. In Tacitus, Tiberius' character does not undergo change.[80] The narrator does not adopt the view expressed by Lucius Arruntius that Tiberius' personality was altered by power (*cum Tiberius post tantam rerum experientiam vi dominationis convulsus et mutatus sit*, *Ann.* 6.48.2). He gives the overall impression that Tiberius concealed his true character until the removal of external restraints allowed him to reveal it. Tiberius is depicted as deliberately bad (*tristiora malle*, *Ann.* 4.31.2), which he conceals by his *dissimulatio*. The notion of Lucius Arruntius and other passages such as the famous one in which Tiberius is pictured as tormented by his guilt (*adeo facinora atque flagitia sua ipsi quoque in supplicium verterant*, *Ann.* 6.6.1) in good Platonic tradition (*Ann.* 6.6.2), show that Tacitus had access to several other psychological models. He did not choose the concept of the unchanging but concealed character simply because he was "incapable of conceiving the notion of change of character".[81] His preference was evidently rather to depict Tiberius' character as consciously vicious.

Most of the time the reader herself is supposed to construct the figures' characters from the depiction of their behaviour, utterances, deeds, and thoughts in the text, or from their first appearance in the text.[82] Although indirect characterization predominates, direct characterization is effectively applied by the narrator too.

The narrator does not have to give the source of his interpretation: he just knows. Interpreting a speech of Tiberius (*Ann.* 1.52.2), the narrator presents an analysis—without further explaining his view—which states that Tiberius' words were merely vain expressions that sounded good but were not truly meant. Domitian's preference for solitude (*secreto suo satiatus*) is interpreted by the narrator as a sign of savage thinking (*Agr.* 39.3).

Direct characterization in the form of a more universal character portrait is often given at crucial points in the narrative. The famous obituary of Tiberius concludes the first hexad (*Ann.* 6.51). Domitian is characterized at the beginning of the first meeting of the senate after the Flavian victory in the *Histories*: power in the city lies with Mucianus, but Domitian, as praetor, dares a lot because his friends incite him or because of his own wantonness (*nisi quod pleraque Domitianus instigantibus amicis aut propria libidine audebat*, *Hist.* 4.39.2).

80 Cf. Gill 1983, 482–486.

81 Gill 1983, 482 referring to this incorrect consumption about Tacitus and other ancient writers.

82 For the characterization of a figure, the moment of entering the stage is important, see e.g. Syme 1958, 308 on Thrasea Paetus.

A more general characteristic of his is given at the very end of book 4, the first book dealing with Flavian rule (*Hist.* 4.86.2): Domitian realizes that he is disdained for his youth by the older people, and he hence gives up even the limited functions in government he has hitherto performed. He hides his thoughts from scrutiny beneath an ingenuous and unassuming appearance, pretends an interest in literature and a love of poems (*studiumque litterarum et amorem carminum simulans, Hist.* 4.86.2). By this the Tacitean Domitian hides his true self and withdraws from the rivalry with his brother, whose dissimilar and milder character he does not understand at all (*Hist.* 4.86.2).

Furthermore, we can see how the narrator both establishes these Tacitean character elements—the irrational side of character, the possible influence of the surroundings, the unchanging parts of character—and how he uses them to create a negative image. To start with the irrational side of character: the depiction of destructive emotions as the reason for the emperor's behaviour predominates. We have already seen Nero's immoderate emotions of joy and sadness.[83] The deconstruction of imperial emotions is also applied to Domitian. He is characterized as prone to anger by nature (*Domitiani vero natura praeceps in iram, Agr.* 42.3). The more he conceals it, we learn, the more implacable he is (*et quo obscurior, eo inrevocabilior*, *Agr.* 42.3). His driving motive against Agricola (*Agr.* 42.3) and against his father and brother is hatred, combined with envy and jealousy.

Since the Tacitean character-concept partly allows for development, the influence and interplay of the emperor and his surroundings can be deconstructed in the text.[84] Regarding Nero, his educators Seneca and Burrus are evaluated according to the influence they exert upon the young emperor, at first in a positive and successful way (*Ann.* 13.2.1–2; 13.6.3; 13.21.1). Nero is then still at the age considered important for character development by certain philosophical theories.[85] But in the long term Seneca's and Burrus' measures are obviously not successful.[86] Their policy of appeasement, which was meant to

83 Cf. p.96.

84 Tiberius' behavior worsens under the influence of Sejanus, who augments Tiberius' hatred for Germanicus (*Ann.* 1.69.5). Agrippina has a similar influence on Claudius, who gives in to his cruel disposition (*Ann.* 12.59.1). In these situations, which present the influence (and development) of character, the critique is not confined to the emperor. Those who influence the emperor's behaviour are analysed by the narrator too.

85 See above and Gill 1983, 476. Cf. *Ann.* 14.56.1: When Nero strategically refers to Seneca's positive influence on him (*quin, si qua in parte lubricum adulescentiae nostrae declinat, revocas ornatumque robur subsidio impensius regis?*), he also refers to youth as a lubricious age. For this Neronian speech see p.78–79.

86 Their role and involvement in Nero's matricide is not clear in Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.7.2), but

allow Nero certain transgressions in order to prevent him from others,[87] has no positive influence (e.g. *cum Senecae ac Burro visum, ne utraque pervinceret, alterum concedere*, *Ann.* 14.14.2; *maerens Burrus ac laudans*, *Ann.* 14.15.4). Burrus' death (*Ann.* 14.51)[88] also breaks Seneca's power (*Ann.* 14.52.1).

3.3.2 (Dis-)Simulatio

In his definition of the character-viewpoint of a Roman historian, Gill points out that the focus on passing moral judgement upon a figure's character does indeed "predispose a historian or biographer to present character as something relatively fixed".[89] If we think of character as rather unchanging, we also have to take into account the concept of (*dis-*)*simulatio*. There is a certain logical connection between the wish or need to change one's character and the ability to conceal certain character traits: if someone is able to conceal his negative character there is less need for moral development. Some of Tacitus' emperors make extensive use of techniques of *simulatio*, and the historian presents it as his task to analyse these processes of *simulatio*.[90] Right at the beginning Augustus' behaviour is analysed as *simulatio*: his grandsons are to be styled 'Princes of the Youth' and nominated as consuls, although they are still only boys; Augustus is said to have craved this, but to have pretended to refuse it (*specie recusantis*, *Ann.* 1.3.2). Especially the depiction of Augustus' successor Tiberius has been analysed in terms of the disguise which he is said to adopt throughout.[91] His successor and nephew Caligula is also depicted as capable of concealing his cruel character (*immanem animum subdola modestia tegens*, *Ann.* 6.20.1). Claudius does not make use of *simulatio*; Nero does so only at the beginning of his reign.[92] He seems aware of the inappropriateness of his representations as artist, but does not conceal them. Rather, his strategy is to legitimize them (*Ann.* 14.14.1; 14.15.1). After him, Vespasian and Titus do not adopt

Tacitus' Nero draws on them for help (*Ann.* 14.7.2; 14.10.2; 14.11.3) during and after the murder.

87 See e.g. *Ann.* 13.2.1; 14.14.2.

88 On the question whether Tacitus' Nero is responsible for Burrus' death see p.140.

89 Gill 1983, 473. This is to be explained by interest in the adult character, "the character of the developed moral agent" (Gill 1983, 477).

90 This regards both behaviour and events depicted. Cf. O'Gorman 2000, 2–3 on the standard claim of the sceptical historiographer: "Central to sceptical history, therefore, and central to Tacitus is the practice of analysing events by representing an appearance as false and unearthing something claimed to be truth, which is sometimes at odds with the appearance".

91 See e.g. *Ann.* 1.11.2 and *Ann.* 1.52.2 about his words and speeches; *Ann.* 2.28.2 about concealing his emotions; Schulz 2015, 169–173 with further references.

92 Cf. the overview on emperors and *simulatio* in Vielberg 2000, 185.

the technique of simulation. But Domitian then figures as a master of *simulatio*. Ascribing methods of simulation to his behaviour can even be regarded as the main strategy of deconstructing his character in Tacitus.[93] In the *Agricola*, too, Domitian's character does not change, but his reign develops and deteriorates steadily towards the end (*Agr.* 44.5–45.1).

We can distinguish two different aspects of *simulatio* in the depiction of Domitian. The first deconstructs his behaviour by claiming that his actions and words as they appear on the surface are not in accord with what he really thinks and wants. In the *Agricola*, Domitian is described as "prepared for simulation" (*paratus simulationi*[94], *Agr.* 42.2). He is able not only to hide his thoughts and to act in a way that deviates from his opinion, but also to control his feelings, even strong emotions. They are not perceptible from the outside, from his appearance, demeanour, or words. After Agricola's success in Britain, for example, he seems happy (*laetus*), to judge from his expression (*fronte*), but inside (*pectore*) he is uneasy (*anxius*) (*Agr.* 39.1). This uneasiness obviously stems from the fear and hatred Tacitus' Domitian is said to feel for his military commander. When he finds himself tormented by the anxieties caused by Agricola's military success, he decides, in a rational act, that it would be best to store up his hatred, an extremely strong emotion, for the present (*optimum in praesentia statuit reponere odium*, *Agr.* 39.3). When Agricola is about to die, Domitian displays an appearance of pain in his expression (*Agr.* 43.3). He is now indifferent to his hatred for Agricola (which had caused him fear), and he can dissimulate the joy he feels more easily than the fear (*securus iam odii et qui facilius dissimularet gaudium quam metum*, *Agr.* 43.4).

A special role in this process of *simulatio* is attributed to Domitian's ruddy complexion. Since blushing is usually an indicator of shame or embarrassment, turning red-faced can help the analysis of a person's feelings. But Domitian's naturally ruddy complexion made it impossible for him to blush (cf. the ironic *nec erubuit* in *Agr.* 42.2[95]), which means that one could not see if he was ashamed of something (*quo se contra pudorem muniebat*, *Agr.* 45.2).[96] It thus supports his strategy of *simulatio*. What is more, it even gains the young Domitian favour, as we learn from his depiction in the first meeting of the senate shortly after the Flavian victory (*Hist.* 4.40.1): Domitian speaks well (*de absen-*

93 Cf. Walker 1952, 47.

94 On the dative *simulationi* see Woodman 2014, 299–300.

95 Cf. Woodman 2014, 300: "Domitian's naturally ruddy complexion (…) meant that he could not be seen blushing at even his most outrageous actions".

96 For his complexion cf. Plin. *Pan.* 48.4 (*in ore impudentia multo rubore suffusa*); Suet. *Dom.* 18.1 (*vultu modesto ruborisque pleno*).

tia patris fratrisque ac iuventa sua pauca et modica disseruit, decorus habitu), but his red complexion is misinterpreted to his advantage: those who did not yet know his character interpret his complexion as a sign of modesty (*et ignotis adhuc moribus crebra oris confusio pro modestia accipiebatur, Hist.* 4.40.1).

The second aspect of Domitian's *simulatio* concerns pretence: his staging of events and performances. As we have seen above, they are deconstructed by claiming that they were fake. This reproach pertains mainly to his triumphs. The critical texts differ as to which triumph was the fake one.[97] Their focus is less on establishing the historical 'truth' than on making an effective reproach of *simulatio*. In Tacitus' version in the *Agricola*, probably concerning the triumph against the German tribes in 83 CE, Domitian is presented as himself knowing (*inerat conscientia*) the difference between Agricola's true success (*veram magnamque victoriam*) and his own fake triumph, which was the source of ridicule (*derisui fuisse nuper falsum e Germania triumphum*) (*Agr.* 39.1). A less official performance, a hunt, is deconstructed by the same technique in Pliny's *Panegyricus*. There the reproach is that tame animals were released from cages so that Domitian could pretend to hunt them: *mentita sagacitate colligerent* (Plin. *Pan.* 81.3). Such a false use of imperial rituals can be explained by the wish of the emperor to fulfil his role and its expectations.[98] Domitian is presented as someone who wants, but is not able to satisfy the demands of the imperial role. Unlike Tacitus' Nero, who interprets this role in his own distinctive way, Domitian follows the more 'conservative' interpretation of his duties. He is not depicted as stepping out of the role, but as fulfilling it merely on the surface.

3.3.3 Focalization

An important narrative strategy that makes the distinction of a surface level and a level of true thoughts and feelings persuasive is focalization: the deconstruction of the figures' behaviour, deeds, and character can be supported by the presentation of events and thoughts from the point of view either of another figure in the narrative or of the main figure him- or herself.[99] The viewpoint provided by another figure is chosen as effective and suitable for the

97 See p.61–62.

98 This is also true of Pliny's Domitian and the role of the consul: he wants to be consul, but does not behave like one; see Plin. *Pan.* 59.2 implicitly referring to Domitian: *tantum velle consules fieri ut fuerint.*

99 For scenes in which Tacitus achieves a certain effect on the reader from an event by describing its effect on figures in the narrative, see Billerbeck 1991, 2755–2759. Cf. Heldmann 2013, 347 on focalization as a general difference between ancient and modern historiography.

depiction of another character.[100] Domitian is seen and characterized in the *Histories* from the point of view of Vespasian and of Mucianus. When Vespasian is in Alexandria in 69 CE after his victory he receives unfavourable news about his son, who has breached the boundaries of his age and the privileges of a son (*tamquam terminos aetatis et concessa filio egrederetur*, *Hist.* 4.51.2). Vespasian is not appeased by him (*haud … Domitiano mitigatus*, *Hist.* 4.52.2). As regards Tacitus' Mucianus, he and others in charge of the city are afraid of Domitian's untamed wantonness (*et Domitiani indomitae libidines timebantur*, *Hist.* 4.68.1). Mucianus' interpretation of Domitian's character, as depicted in the text, is as an ardent person who has to be held back (*moras nectens, quis flagrantem retineret*, *Hist.* 4.68.3).

As well as individual people, a collective such as Rome or the people can provide their view of someone's character too. We are told that after Augustus' death a great majority of the people discussed Augustus' possible successors in various common conversations. Tacitus reports their opinion of Tiberius, which includes a characterization of him: he has the old and ingrained arrogance (*superbia*) of the Claudian family, and many signs of his cruelty break through, although he tries to suppress them (*multaque indicia saevitiae, quamquam premantur, erumpere*) (*Ann.* 1.4.3). The people's opinion of Tiberius is also expressed when Germanicus falls ill shortly before his death: people assume a plot against Germanicus organized by Tiberius, Livia, and Piso (*Ann.* 2.82). Later it is even presented as common knowledge that Tiberius had badly concealed his joy over Germanicus' death (*gnaris omnibus laetam Tiberio Germanici mortem male dissimulari*, *Ann.* 3.2.3). Claiming that such a large group of people shares a view makes it appear more forceful and plausible in the text.

100 Thus the characterizations of Germanicus as ideal military leader and of Tiberius as debauched tyrant are appropriately underlined when we learn that Artabanus, king of the Parthians, feels fear of Germanicus, but contempt for Tiberius (*metu Germanici … et senectutem Tiberii ut inermem despiciens*, *Ann.* 6.31.1). Germanicus himself also functions as a focalizer of Tiberius. Seeing the tyrant through the lens of the ideal successor intensifies the picture of both characters. The claim that Livia and Tiberius hate Germanicus is made more plausible when Germanicus himself is depicted as afraid of them because of their hidden hatred: *anxius occultis in se patrui aviaeque odiis* (*Ann.* 1.33.1). When Tacitus' Germanicus is not granted another year in Germany by Tiberius, Tiberius' decision is deconstructed by the same device of embedded focalization. The narrator presents this decision through the eyes of his protagonist Germanicus: Tacitus' Germanicus realizes that Tiberius' reasons were simulated and motivated by his jealousy of Germanicus' own fame (*quamquam fingi ea seque per invidiam parto iam decori abstrahi intellegeret*, *Ann.* 2.26.5). The reader is invited to follow the analysis of Germanicus and consider Tiberius' action through the viewpoint of the person whom the text has established as the next great hope.

The focalizer of the emperor's bad character may also be the emperor himself. Tiberius is presented as being well aware of his behaviour and as ashamed of his crimes and desires (*pudore scelerum et libidinum*, *Ann.* 6.1.1).[101] In the passage in the *Agricola* mentioned above, in which Domitian is shown as being aware of the difference between Agricola's true success and his own fake victory, this contrast is mentioned by the narrator not as a fact but as the inner thoughts of Domitian.[102] The shifts from the perspective of the narrator and the presentation of Domitian's inner thoughts can be quick and unclear, blurring the boundaries between the two levels. For example, as mentioned in the previous section, it is presented as Domitian's own decision to store up his hatred against Agricola until the effect of glory and the favour of the army would fade (*optimum in praesentia statuit reponere odium, donec impetus famae et favor exercitus languesceret*, *Agr.* 39.3). The following explicative *nam*-clause gives the reason for Domitian's thoughts, presented by the narrator in the indicative (*nam etiam tum Agricola Britanniam obtinebat*, *Agr.* 39.3): Agricola still held Britain—and, so we have to supply, could have planned to become emperor. Domitian's thoughts, his embedded focalization, and the narrator's explanations are thus intertwined. The authorial statement of the narrator, which provides the reason for Domitian's decision, makes this decision appear more plausible.

4 New Forms of Logic

4.1 *Overview: Constructions of Temporal and Social Logic*

Besides the connection between event and reason, other logical relations, too, can be shown as damaged, unnatural, or dysfunctional. Just like causal logic, temporal and social logic—or the lack of both—may be used in the texts to deconstruct an emperor's actions. Regarding the logic of time (p.124–127) we can distinguish two quite different forms of deconstruction on two different narrative levels. First, the emperor can be shown as not accepting or behaving according to the logic of time: he may be depicted negatively as someone who does not care about the temporal order of events. Second, the narrator

101 Similarly, Agrippina's crimes are made more plausible by presenting them through her own focalization (*Ann.* 13.14).

102 Cf. also the analysis of this passage in Döpp 1985, 157: "Die Antithese von Scheinsieg und wirklichem Sieg wird also ins Bewußtsein der Hauptfigur verlegt und erhält damit besondere Suggestivkraft".

can construct a temporal logic for the narrative that underlines or creates a negative picture of the emperor. Social logic—in a broad sense—can be pictured as being destroyed by the emperor in two forms too (p.127–129). The emperor's deeds, especially the ritual performances expected in his imperial role, often appear in the narrative as vain and senseless. The emperor is then reproached for fulfilling only the form of a performance without satisfying the actual demands and content of the ritual. Or else the emperor's behaviour and his way of dealing with his social surroundings are depicted as resulting in a perversion of norms, virtues, and social logic.

4.2 *Temporal Logic: The Manipulation of Chronological Order*

Tacitus' Nero often defies time and takes actions in the wrong chronological order. His behaviour then illustrates how he is not bound by the correct sequence of events. This pertains mostly to his murders and death sentences. The Tacitean Nero accuses victims and allows them to choose their manner of death only after they are dead (*Ann.* 16.11.3). The logical chronological sequence of 'accusation—choice of death—death' is turned into the illogical sequence 'death—accusation—choice of death'. Tacitus explicitly terms this "mockeries": *ea caedibus peractis ludibria adiciebantur* (*Ann.* 16.11.3). People also learn that they have been accused only once they have been convicted (*reos fuisse se tantum poena experti, Ann.* 15.71.5).[103] In another, typical (*ex more*) case, Nero highlights his clemency and his potentially mild behaviour after someone's death (*si clementiam iudicis exspectasset*) (*Ann.* 15.35.3). The virtue of *clementia*, for which the historical Nero is in a protreptic way praised in the *De clementia*, has become only a hypothetical one. Tacitus' Nero seems to be aware that the instrument of mildness is available to him, but he does not use it as Seneca in his treatise would have wanted the historical Nero to do. The virtue associated with the imperial representation of the historical emperor is thus deconstructed in the historiographical discourse.

The second, very different form of new temporal construction is based on the narrator constructing time. Tacitean emperors are not only depicted as defying the logic of time themselves: they are also part of the narrator's constructions of time. This narrative order of time can be conceived as a manipulation of a sequence of (historical) time. Ronald Syme remarks that "exact chronology was often impracticable—and often superfluous".[104] We can go further and say that exact chronology can be a hindrance to a persuasive critical

103 By contrast, Tacitus' Thrasea Paetus underlines the order of *culpa* and *poena* (*Ann.* 14.20.3).
104 Syme 1958, 390.

depiction. With the devices described next, the *Annals* turn out to belie the alleged inartistic shapelessness of Roman *Annals* and other year-by-year chronicles.[105]

How an effective narrative sequence supports the construction of a bad image of an emperor can be illustrated by the passage about the events leading to the Great Fire of Rome in 64 CE (*Ann.* 15.37.1–4). Tacitus' Nero has just cancelled his journey to Greece (*Ann.* 15.36). The first element in this passage is the banquet of Tigellinus (*Ann.* 15.37.1–3).[106] We do not know and are not given a date for the city orgy organized by Nero's prefect, but it is connected to Nero's staying in Rome. Nero wanted to give credence to the idea that nowhere else gave him as much pleasure as Rome (*Ann.* 15.37.1). By this logical link, the narrator makes it plausible that the city orgy happened after the cancellation of the journey. The following marriage with Pythagoras, the second element in this narrative, is linked to the banquet by stating that Pythagoras had been present as one of this crowd of defiled people (*Ann.* 15.37.4). Moreover, it is depicted as the last remaining transgression open to Nero, as I have hinted above: the text shows Nero crossing every moral boundary, and does so in three stages. First, he disgraces himself by things that are allowed and by things that are not allowed (*per licita atque inlicita foedatus*), so that there is no shameful act left by which he could behave even more immorally (*quo corruptior ageret*) (*Ann.* 15.37.4). The grammar, with Nero himself as subject of the sentence, shows his full agency in this disgrace. But the text has established this new boundary only to make Nero break it again. The act by which he crosses this last boundary is, secondly, his marriage as a woman to Pythagoras, which is said to have happened a few days later: *nisi paucos post dies uni ex illo contaminatorum grege* (*nomen Pythagorae fuit*) *in modum solemnium coniugiorum denupsisset* (*Ann.* 15.37.4).[107] For a reader who wonders what may now be left for the debauched Nero to do, the climactic answer is the Great Fire of Rome, as the third element of transgression, following just after the banquet and the marriage in the narrative (*Ann.* 15.38–45).

Unlike the journey to Greece and the banquet of Tigellinus and unlike the banquet and the marriage to Pythagoras, the fire is not directly connected logically to these events. The connection is just a temporal one: *sequitur clades* (*Ann.* 15.38.1). But the reader trained to establish logical, causal connections

105 For this alleged lack of artistry see *Dial.* 22.5 (*nulli sensus tarda et inerti structura in morem annalium componantur*) and Cic. *De Or.* 2.51–53.

106 Cf. my close reading of this passage on p.71–72.

107 See p.103–104.

between the events may also see a causal connection here.[108] After the banquet, as we have heard, there was no misdeed left for Nero to do, except to marry Pythagoras. The orgy-transgression is itself transgressed. At this peak of transgression of Roman virile morals and virtues Tacitus has the Great Fire of 64 CE follow these two episodes. The logic of the text as outlined thus seems to present the fire as the transgression of the transgression (marriage with Pythagoras) of the transgression (the banquet of Tigellinus).

The narrator's presentation of time can also have effect through the rhythm or pace chosen.[109] Siegmar Döpp has analysed the temporal structure and pace of the final passages of the *Agricola*.[110] The section of *Agr*. 39–43 in fact depicts the period from 84–93 CE. That the text deals with a time period of almost ten years is concealed by the accelerated presentation of the events. The three different events of this passage—Agricola's return to Rome from Britain; Agricola's forced renunciation of the proconsulship; Agricola's illness and death—were separated by six and three years respectively. In Tacitus, they seem to have happened one directly after the other, and this chronological closeness implies a causal connection too.

We can set these manipulative techniques—creating logical links through temporal links, and changing the pace of historical events—in the broader context of the narrator and his presentation of time. He makes use of the devices of *prolepsis* (foreshadowing) and *analepsis* (flashback) to guide the reader.[111] In these cases, the chronology is not directly manipulated by lack of time specification or by constructing temporal and causal connections where none exist, but the order still has a certain effect on the reader. When we look, for example, at the depiction of the events following Agrippina's death, the narrator says that Agrippina was cremated in a paltry funeral (*exequiis vilibus*, *Ann*. 14.9.1) the night after she died. The narrative then shifts into the future to the end of Nero's reign. Until then, we learn, the burial ground was not heaped up in a grave-mound or closed over (by a gravestone): *neque, dum Nero rerum potiebatur,*

108 Cf. Syme 1958, 310, who also sees a logical connection between the two 'spectacles' of Tigellinus' banquet and the Great Fire of Rome: "Tigellinus organizes a water festival for Nero, with all the apparatus of luxury and debauch: another spectacle follows abruptly, the conflagration of the city." See also Allen 1962, 103: "he intends causality instead of mere temporal sequence". Likewise, we have already seen (p.109–110) that the official reason for Octavia's banishment is directly followed by a new action, namely that Nero marries Poppaea, and that, while the connection is only a temporal one (*Ann*. 14.60.1), the direct juxtaposition implies a logical link too.

109 This technique is not exclusive to Tacitus, see e.g. Classen 1983 on Caesar.

110 See Döpp 1985, 153–154.

111 See Hausmann 2012, 144–145.

congesta aut clausa humus (*Ann.* 14.9.1). Only later did Agrippina receive a modest tomb through the devotion of her servants (*Ann.* 14.9.1). The narrative now shifts back to the night after her death and reports that one of her freedman, Mnester, killed himself with a sword and ran through the burning pyre (*Ann.* 14.9.2). Again, the narrative shifts, this time into the past. The narrator tells us that Agrippina had long been expecting this end to her life (*Ann.* 14.9.3). The Chaldeans had once prophesied that Nero would kill her and she had replied that he may kill her as long as he also came to power (*Ann.* 14.9.3). By shifting from the present to the future to the present to the past, and then again to the present (*Ann.* 14.10.1) the narrator comes full circle and presents a time structure that rounds off Agrippina's life and death. This treatment of time is not directly connected to the characterization of Nero, but it argues for the authority of the narrator in his knowledge and design of time in the narrative.

4.3 *Social Logic: Empty or Perverted Norms*

By 'social logic' I mean the relation of an action to its approval or disapproval according to the normative or moral value that it is ascribed in society. The social logic is working well if a society praises deeds that are in accord with its norms and criticizes deeds that are against them. Certain actions are rewarded, for example by public honours, when they are in accord with society's norms. One technique of deconstructing imperial representation is to show that this logic of action and reward is not fulfilled by the emperor. Honours and symbols of appreciation and praise are found to be empty. The external form pretends a praiseworthy action where in fact there is no content to be applauded, no *fundamentum in re*.

Domitian's triumphs as analysed above are deconstructed in this way. He triumphed only in form, not in content. Nero's honours, by contrast, are based on real victories, but he is depicted as completely uninvolved in them.[112] The text ascribes the military success to Nero's generals, especially Corbulo. Or it shows that the triumphal arch after the victory over the Parthians had been decreed before the war was even over, and was erected without acknowledgement of the truth (*spreta conscientia, Ann.* 15.18.1). The logic of military merit and reward is thus disturbed. Symbolic buildings and performances celebrating military achievements have lost their foundation in reality. This is a reproach not only to the doings of the emperor, but also to the senators and people.[113]

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112 See p.57–60.

113 See p.100 on *Ann.* 13.8.1 (the senate praising Nero's success in Armenia) and p.78 on *Ann.* 13.11.2 (Seneca writing Nero's speeches to display his own talent).

Thank offerings after the deaths of Agrippina (*Ann.* 14.12.1), Sulla and Plautus (*Ann.* 14.59.4), and Octavia (*Ann.* 14.64.3), as we have seen,[114] are directly and indirectly characterized as mere show (*quaeque rerum secundarum olim, tum publicae cladis insignia fuisse, Ann.* 14.64.3).

The same is true of the depiction of Nero's artistic contests, in which his honours do not equal his achievement. Tacitus' Nero is simply pronounced winner of the prize for oratory at the *Neronia* in 60 CE: *eloquentiae primas nemo tulit, sed victorem esse Caesarem pronuntiatum* (*Ann.* 14.21.4). His imperial representation as artist is deconstructed not only by showing that it does not suit the role of emperor, but also by claiming that Nero's achievements, at least regarding his own poetry, were of poor quality (*Ann.* 14.16.1). This doubles the criticism of these forms of imperial representation: even if they were of good quality for an artist, they would be disgusting for an emperor, but that they are also criticized for their quality makes them even worse.

Tacitus' Nero prefers form over content on other occasions too. He believes what he wants to believe and what is advanced in a persuasive manner. Unlike Burrus, for example, he accepts Julia Silana's reproaches against Agrippina before inquiring into the truth (*Ann.* 13.20). He also believes the lie against Cornelius Sulla (*Ann.* 13.47). Content is also less important for him than form when it comes to homage. Nero expects Thrasea, who is accused of not numbering Nero's voice and Poppaea among the goddesses, to say things that increase his glory (*Ann.* 16.24.2), but whether Thrasea really believes what he says seems less relevant than the fact that he says it. When Nero removes the cohort that is usually stationed to watch over the games, he is said to do so because he wants to give a greater impression of freedom (*maior species libertatis, Ann.* 13.24.1). External appearance and form again beat content.

The second way of breaking social logic is based on a perversion of norms depicted in the texts. Emperors who are criticized for their behaviour and actions are mostly described as acting on the basis of new norms. What they do appears not to be in accord with the virtues established in Roman society. This perversion of norms shown in the text can be analysed through single actions of the emperor, as has already been illustrated by the analyses in the previous sections. In addition, some passages create the image of a more general perversion of social norms by the emperor by highlighting his self-image: Nero's interpretation of imperial power, for example, is, so Tacitus, to kill people of high rank (*ut magnitudinem imperatoriam caede insignium virorum quasi regio facinore ostentaret, Ann.* 16.23.2). Domitian is characterized as hostile to vir-

114 Cf. p.101.

tues (*infensus virtutibus princeps*, *Agr*. 41.1) and as generally inclined towards inferior things[115] (*pronum deterioribus principem*, *Agr*. 41.4).

The neglect of virtues hitherto accepted by society and the introduction of new norms has effects on the behaviour of others.[116] When Tacitus' Tiberius after the death of Agrippina the Elder congratulates himself that she had at least not been strangled and thrown down the Gemonian Steps (*Ann*. 6.25.3) the reader must regard this as very low bar for virtue. However, the emperor is given official thanks for this (*Ann*. 6.25.3). The public is not only depicted as reacting according to the low or perverted virtues of the emperor, but also as exhibiting equally bad behaviour itself. Under Tiberius, we hear, Fulcinius Trio, an accuser, also promotes a harmful self-image: he was thirsting for an evil reputation (*celebre inter accusatores Trionis ingenium erat avidumque famae malae*, *Ann*. 2.28.3). While people following the new, perverted norms are thus criticized, those living according to the narrator's ideals meet negative responses in the text. Bad behaviour is described as having no consequences or as more successful than good behaviour: murders do not have to be concealed anymore (*Ann*. 13.1.2); a repulsive figure like Vatinius makes his way by denigrating the honest (*Ann*. 15.34.2). Telling the truth can be just as dangerous as saying something false (*Ann*. 1.6.3). Under the Tacitean Nero, Barea Soranus increases the emperor's resentment by his fairness and industry (*offensiones principis auxit iustitia atque industria*, *Ann*. 16.23.1). Nero's Augustiani act as though they were famous and honourable through virtue (*quasi per virtutem clari honoratique agere*, *Ann*. 14.15.5). People who do not want to acknowledge the virtues of the emperor are forced to do so, as are descendants of noble families, whom Nero parades on stage because their poverty leaves them no other choice (*Ann*. 14.14.3).[117]

115 Or to inferior people, cf. Woodman 2014, 297.

116 In this sense, Juvenal points out that the emperor determines the structures of his society, cf. Iuv. 8.198–199: *res haut mira tamen citharoedo principe mimus / nobilis*. See also Sen. *Clem*. 1.13: the tyrant turns his subjects into executioners and murderers.

117 See p.74–75 for Tacitus not mentioning the aristocratic interest in performances.

CHAPTER 5

Creating Uncertainty

1 Tacitus and Theories of Uncertainty

Although, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, Tacitus does deconstruct positive images of imperial representation by several means, his text is accompanied by an uncertainty about his deconstruction and about interpretation.[1] This final chapter on Tacitus deals with the potential effect of his text on the reader, assuming, with cognitive-dissonance theory, that readers (and people in general) psychologically prefer certainty over uncertainty, non-ambiguity over ambiguity, being convinced of something over an uncertain dynamic of communication.[2] With its focus on the dialogue between text and reader, this chapter stands in the tradition of reader-response analyses: its readings value a certain openness and ambiguity as a quality of a literary text; reading the text is conceived as a process in which the reader forms and tests hypotheses, in which her expectations are confirmed or contradicted, in which her strategies of interpretation are open to testing. However, the chapter is mainly inspired by theories dealing with textual uncertainty, and will argue that Tacitean deconstruction of imperial representation takes place in a text that, to a certain degree, challenges its own methods of interpretation and deconstruction.[3] This uncertainty, I suggest, can be better understood and explained by drawing on studies and theories of inconsistency, closure, and disconcertion. We will focus on Nero and Domitian, but include other text passages, in particular on Tiberius, too, to illustrate how the feature of uncertainty pervades Tacitus' whole work.

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1 We have already analysed the atmosphere in the *Annals* as being opposed to panegyrical Golden Age concepts, namely as full of change, and therefore characterized by instability and uncertainty (p.92–93). For disconcerting effects see e.g. p.95 on *Ann.* 15.43.5.

2 Cf. Knape 2015, 12–13: "Nach Leon Festingers 1957 formulierter und inzwischen empirisch gut abgesicherter *cognitive dissonance*-Theorie brauchen die Menschen normalerweise diesen Zustand des überwiegenden Überzeugt-Seins, um sich wohl zu fühlen (Homöostase). (…) Demnach versuchen wir unter standardkommunikativen Bedingungen immer wieder, im Verstehensprozess die ‚uncertain dynamic' jeglicher Kommunikation in Richtung Eindeutigkeit zu reparieren."

3 In doing so, my analysis in part comes closer to deconstruction in the traditional sense (cf. p.43–44), since I am dealing with the destabilizing effect of binary oppositions and inconsistencies on the text. However, I still regard this as a strategy of the text, not as proof that it is unreadable.

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Modern studies of inconsistency have focused on "the possibility of interpreting, rather than removing or explaining away, inconsistencies in ancient texts".[4] They are closely related to studies of polyphony, which likewise challenge the idea that to be good a literary work must be a "single-voiced, unified work".[5] They ask how the reader or critic should react to contradictions in a work and to different types of inconsistencies, such as "factual inconsistencies", or "inconsistencies of theme, philosophy, and political attitudes".[6] Such inconsistencies are accepted as an integral part of a work, which is "deliberately or at least functionally inconsistent".[7] Inconsistencies are therefore interpreted and read as potentially "being used with some skill to make certain suggestions".[8] They have been read as a typical feature of poetic discourse as opposed to philosophical discourse.[9] And theories of inconsistency have been applied more to poetry, especially epic, than to prose.[10] But in principle they aim to "help to establish a framework for understanding the poetic or rhetorical use of inconsistencies in any ancient author".[11] For this reason the results of these studies should also be taken seriously for Tacitus, who has often been condemned "on the evidence of his own inconsistencies and his glaring disregard, in his general interpretations, of the factual account presented in his own work".[12] I will focus on forms of inconsistency specific to Tacitus that also pertain to how he depicts imperial representation, such as the presentation of alternative versions of events and unstable patterns of interpretation, and their function within his work.

Studies of closure analyse, among other things, the "process by which the reader of a work comes to see the end as satisfyingly final", and the "degree to which the questions posed in the work are answered, tensions released, conflicts resolved".[13] 'Closure' may refer to "the concluding section of a literary

4 O'Hara 2007, 1.
5 O'Hara 2007, 6.
6 O'Hara 2007, 3. Cf. O'Hara 2007, 5.
7 O'Hara 2007, 134.
8 O'Hara 2007, 5.
9 O'Hara 2007, 19.
10 For Roman epic, some degree of inconsistency is accepted as the norm: "Roman epic regularly features conflicting passages, voices, versions, chronologies, sympathies, ideas, and themes" (O'Hara 2007, 142). Epic poets "did use inconsistency to characterize speakers or narrators, make thematic suggestions, dramatize problems or conflicts, produce ambiguity or indeterminacy, raise questions about power and authority, and represent the varied complexity of the world" (O'Hara 2007, 142).
11 O'Hara 2007, 5.
12 Ryberg 1942, 383.
13 Fowler 1997, 3, distinguishing five different senses of 'closure', which are all interconnected.

work and/or the process by which we read and interpret that concluding section",[14] as in John Marincola's study presenting "a synopsis of some of the major characteristics of closure that are observable in the Greek and Roman historians".[15] But it can also refer—as "infratextual closure"—to episodes or scenes within a work.[16] Two observations on dialectic made by studies and theories of closure are especially relevant for my analysis of Tacitus: first, closure and aperture do not have to be studied separately, but, rather, it is illuminating to look for "*a dialectic between them* in a text";[17] second, another sort of dialectic is inherent to historiography: "narrative history needs to suggest simultaneously the sense of an ending and the continuance of the historical process".[18] In my analysis of Tacitus, I will apply a broad concept of 'closure' and argue that he constantly works with the dialectic between closure and aperture, also as regards imperial representation and deconstruction, in his historical narrative, which continuously constructs the sense of an ending only to open it up again.

Theories and studies of disconcertion analyse certain literary mechanisms and their effect on the reader as 'disconcerting'.[19] On the one hand, disconcertion is closely connected with disrupting the expectations of a reader or recipient.[20] Everything that the recipient of a theatre play or the reader of a text can make fit into his system of values will fulfil his expectations and make him content; but everything that deviates from the norm of convention, in general, will disconcert a recipient or reader: he is disconcerted if he cannot grasp something by his criteria of judgment and regular categories.[21] The recipient who is disconcerted because he is not able to explain something by the conventional norms will have to develop his own critical thinking.[22] On the other hand, disconcertion has been defined from the point of view of an active communicator, mainly an orator, as a means to achieve a rhetorical process of

14 Marincola 2005, 287.
15 Marincola 2005, 285.
16 Fowler 1997, 13.
17 Fowler 1997, 5.
18 Marincola 2005, 316; cf. Marincola 2005, 286, drawing on Fowler's work on closure.
19 See the studies on e.g. Augustine, Seneca, and Plato in Früh et al. 2015, and Sallmann 1988 on Apuleius.
20 See Jäkel 1986.
21 Cf. Jäkel 1986, 9: "Alles, was er [sc. der Leser] in dieses sein Wertsystem einzuordnen vermag, entspricht seinem Erwartungshorizont und befriedigt ihn, wohingegen alles, was außerhalb seines Wertsystems liegt, sich also nicht mit den ihm vertrauten Urteilskriterien erfassen läßt, seine Irritation erregt, d.h. es beunruhigt ihn, weil er es nicht beurteilen und in die ihm geläufigen Kategorien einordnen kann."
22 Cf. Jäkel 1986, 12.

destabilization, in which a recipient is made to feel disconcerted about a certain piece of 'knowledge' in order to make him reach a new 'knowledge'.[23] Both perspectives on the use of disconcerting devices are important for my analysis of Tacitus' text and his methods of deconstructing imperial representation. I argue that, as a function of his text, he applies strategies that disconcert the reader, and that this makes the reader to a certain degree distrust Tacitus and his way of deconstructing imperial representation.

This chapter deals with certain literary mechanisms used in Tacitus' forms of deconstruction that involve inconsistency, a dialectic of closure and aperture, and disconcertion. Two methods to achieve uncertainty can be distinguished: first, Tacitus plays with alternatives, with inconsistent variants, and this play is characterized by a certain inconsistency, which is disconcerting (p.133–148); second, Tacitus plays with oppositions, and depicts them as unstable or as causing instability, which disconcerts (p.149–158). In both cases, he builds up expectations of norms and behaviour, which he then breaks. There is no 'closure' of methods of interpretation (p.159–165).

2 Playing with Variants

2.1 *Alternative Versions*

It is a standard practice of historians to present not one, but several versions or several possible explanations of a single event, action, or form of imperial representation. They are often inconsistent; they cannot all be true at the same time. Different variants of a story or reason may be connected with a certain authority, a group of people defined vaguely or not at all,[24] or variants may simply be stated without naming a source for them.[25] The author "can, as he wishes, record, dismiss, ignore or include versions of dubious or inascertainable authority",[26] and through several variants "include a number of nasty interpretations without any indication of the nature of the authority in any case".[27] Such variants or alternative versions and motives in Tacitus have been

23 See Knape 2015.

24 For the use of the expressions *tradunt*, *ferunt*, and forms of *credere* see Develin 1983, 77: "This, then, is the use of such verbs, highly suspect at times as literal truth, often the story which suits Tacitus, however deficient the authority for it may have been."

25 Grethlein 2013, 162 calls this ("the assignation of stories to other authors, rumours and alternative versions") "narratorial uncertainty" or "narrative ambiguity".

26 Develin 1983, 85.

27 Develin 1983, 73.

the topic of studies that have analysed insidious alternatives as a technique of innuendo and implied judgement.[28]

Inez Ryberg discusses "devices by which Tacitus leads the reader to make the accusations which the historian is unwilling to make".[29] She thereby distinguishes between Tacitus the historian who "would not suppress or misstate the facts" and Tacitus the artist who "could guide the reader's interpretation of them".[30] Tacitus' techniques of innuendo are characterized by her as so implicit, subtle, and constant that they to some degree defy analysis in detail.[31] Ryberg claims that the conflict between the "recorded facts" of a reign and Tacitus' conception of the historian's task, in which "the technique of innuendo comes most conspicuously into play", are "frequent in the account of Tiberius but relatively rare in the story of Nero".[32] David Whitehead's "empirically-derived" approach presents a "collection of data" on all the alternatives presented in Tacitus and formulated with the conjunctions *vel/an/aut/sive/seu*.[33] He focuses on "the provision by the historian of an alternative explanation or account, apparently impartially but in practice guiding the reader to a particular conclusion".[34] Whitehead searches for Tacitus' point of view among alternatives: he analyses Tacitus' use of alternatives and studies where Tacitus' opinion lies within them. He distinguishes cases in which the emphasis and hence Tacitus' opinion is "probably or certainly on first alternative" (four cases in Tacitus) from cases in which there is "no discernible emphasis" (92 cases in Tacitus) and from cases in which the emphasis is "probably or certainly on second (or last) alternative" (49 cases in Tacitus)—but also points out that it is not always clear how to rubricize the single cases. In his study it turns out that it is not true that the second "or" in Tacitus is usually closest to his view. "What we

28 Cf. also the overview in Hellegouarc'h 1991, 2414–2416.

29 Ryberg 1942, 391.

30 Ryberg 1942, 383. Cf. Ryberg 1942, 384: she interprets inconsistencies in Tacitus as "the resources employed by Tacitus the artist to produce an impression for which Tacitus the historian is not willing to take the responsibility".

31 Cf. Ryberg 1942, 390: "Most subtle and most constantly employed of all Tacitus' resources is the innuendo which depends purely on choice and arrangement of words, or on clever juxtaposition of ideas; and this, like his interpretation of character and motives, is so much a part of the fabric of the *Annals* as to defy analysis in detail." And further on Archelaus' suicide and Tiberius' role in it: "The impression of Tiberius' guilt is implicit in every line of the brief narrative, though nowhere can there be found any actual charge."

32 Ryberg 1942, 404.

33 Whitehead 1979, 475. Whitehead's analysis is inspired by Yavetz 1975, 190 ("A detailed analysis of Tacitus' usage of the words *vel* or *an* would perhaps prove that the second 'or' was usually closest to his own view.").

34 Hardie 2009, 560, referring to Whitehead 1979.

can, however, say is that *when* (approximately once in every three occasions) Tacitus did wish to load the choice one way or the other, it was virtually always toward the second (or last) alternative."[35] Whitehead remarks that *Annals* 15 shows a concentration of alternatives regarding events and motives presented and that alternatives cluster around certain significant events such as the death of Agrippina, the Great Fire of Rome, and the Pisonian conspiracy.[36] Develin, already cited in this section, studies expressions of uncertainty and the inclusion of different variants of events as Tacitean techniques of innuendo. He collects and analyses passages in which Tacitus gives several variants, underlines that the historian also mentions variants he explicitly regards not true, that Tacitus sometimes decides which one he deems trustworthy and sometimes not, and that some variants may even be his own invention.[37] Develin makes a strong argument against reading Tacitus' confessions of uncertainty about different variants as signs of his objectivity.[38]

The interpretation of Tacitus' use of alternative versions that I shall offer here both agrees and disagrees with these previous studies. My interest is less in the antithesis or inconsistency of alternatives than in their dialectic, the way they work together in the text. I follow the notion that Tacitus' use of alternatives is not to be read as a feature of his objective attitude, but that his innuendo guides the reader in a certain way. His technique is indeed difficult to grasp and describe by analysis—or, at least not by mere statistics, helpful as they may be. I do not focus on the sheer numbers of alternatives, but on the impression and atmosphere they convey. Just as one single counter-example can refute a hypothesis confirmed by a thousand previous examples, one different use of alternatives can change the way the readers understand several others. My focus is on the reader confronted with a text that plays with alternatives and opposites, not on the point of view of Tacitus himself. Tacitus the historian and Tacitus the artist are, in my analysis, not separate instantiations of one person, but closely intertwined. I will demonstrate that the artist-historian uses the presentation of variants (and his play with oppositions)[39] to disconcert the reader. This is

35 Whitehead 1979, 493.

36 Cf. Whitehead 1979, 495. His statistical analysis refutes Ryberg 1942, 398, who claims, as mentioned above, that "[i]n the last six books of the *Annals* Tacitus' technique of creating an impression for which he declines to accept responsibility appears only rarely".

37 See Develin 1983, 82 in the context of discussing *Ann.* 1.76: "All versions are allowed in; even what Tacitus professes not to believe is finally given a chance. There are times when it suits Tacitus not to make a choice, and there is some possibility that variants such as these were invented."

38 See e.g. Develin 1983, 94.

39 See p.133–158.

based on the premise that the question of which of the variants Tacitus decides to present and how he does this depends not only on his sources, but also, and mainly, on his literary strategies and purposes. My interest in Tacitus' use of alternative variants is not in finding out their historical truth or their sources. Whether one of the alternatives presents a historical 'fact' and the other does not is not the issue in this section.[40] I focus rather on the different ways in which Tacitus plays with variants and oppositions, and I argue that the very act of presenting pieces of information as alternative variants or as oppositions may disconcert the recipients of Tacitean texts.[41] Whether disconcertion is or is not caused, does not depend on the statements of the Tacitean narrator about these variants: he may explicitly decide, or implicitly suggest or insinuate, which of several versions presented he prefers, or he may leave this question completely open. Disconcertion, I contend, can be achieved in each of these cases.

Let us first take a look at passages in which alternative, inconsistent versions are given and the narrator states explicitly which one he regards as more trustworthy. Early in the *Annals* the question is raised of who is responsible for the murder of Agrippa Postumus, the first murder of the principate of Tiberius. There are two alternatives: Was Augustus responsible, having ordered that Agrippa Postumus be killed as soon as he himself had died? Or are Tiberius and Livia responsible (*Ann.* 1.6)? Tacitus favours the version by which Tiberius and Livia are the culprits, by analysing the plausibility of each alternative. It is not plausible, we are told, that Augustus would have his grandson Agrippa killed for the advantage of his stepson Tiberius (*neque mortem nepoti pro securitate privigni inlatam credibile erat*, *Ann.* 1.6.2). Tacitus considers it closer to the truth (*proprius vero*) that Tiberius, motivated by fear, and Livia, driven by the hatred of a stepmother, hurriedly effected his assassination (*Ann.* 1.6.2).

In a similar way, the first murder in Nero's principate is clearly pinned down to one of two explanations. Silanus is murdered by Agrippina not because of his violent nature (*ingenii violentia*)—alternative 1—but because he is a great-great-grandson of Augustus—alternative 2—as the passage reveals only at the end (*quippe et Silanus divi Augusti abnepos erat. haec causa necis*, *Ann.* 13.1.1–2). Likewise, Tacitus explicitly prefers the version according to which Nero killed Poppaea in an outburst of anger by a kick when she was pregnant (*Ann.* 16.6.1). This is stated as a fact. The alternative version of Poppaea's death, namely that

40 On the issue of the construction of 'facts' see p.47–48.

41 The historian's "information management" is also at the centre of Therese Fuhrer's analysis of Sallust's episode on Cicero's election as consul (Sall. *Cat.* 23–28), in which she focuses on how much information is given, in which context, and in which order (Fuhrer 2018).

she was killed by poison, is explicitly rejected (*neque enim venenum crediderim*, *Ann.* 16.6.1).[42] To make the refutation stronger, Tacitus gives an explanation for the existence of the wrong version: the *quidam scriptores* who favour the version of the story in which Nero kills Poppaea by poison do so *odio magis quam ex fide*, more because they hate Nero than because they believe the story (*Ann.* 16.6.1). On the one hand, by saying so, the narrator constructs for himself a trustworthy persona which is aiming at objectivity. On the other hand, the reader is made aware of the fact that historians in presenting their accounts may be led by personal feelings, in this case hatred. The reader can either accept that the author of the *Annals* is impartial because he mentions the feelings that guide (other) authors, or may doubt his impartiality for exactly the same reason.[43] In addition to this disconcertion, the way in which the wrong alternative is explicitly rejected is somewhat disconcerting: Tacitus does not give the names of the authors whose version deviates from his own here, although he promised to do so earlier (*nos consensum auctorum secuturi, quae diversa prodiderint, sub nominibus ipsorum trademus*, *Ann.* 13.20.2).[44] But the rejection of an alternative for Poppaea's death not only attracts attention because Tacitus attributes it to other unnamed authors and, in anonymizing them, breaks his own rule. It also puts emphasis on refuting wrongs done to Nero, and this at a point where they are hardly necessary. The disconcertion typical of Tacitus is not an aspect of Cassius Dio's or Suetonius' passages on Poppaea's death. Cassius Dio does not mention the version that the murder was a poisoning (Cass. Dio 62.28.1–3): he is interested rather in Poppaea's luxury, concern about her beauty, and Nero's longing for her after her death, which makes him castrate the boy Sporus who resembles her. Dio gives all this information in the context of Poppaea's death. Nor is there any disconcertion over Poppaea's death in Suetonius. Nero's murder of her by a kick is mentioned in the rubric on *crudelitas*, and is made

42 Develin also discusses this alternative as striking but considers it to be ironic (cf. Develin 1983, 90). However, planned and insidious poisoning is indeed a stronger reproach than killing as a crime of passion, which Nero later regretted. We should take the two alternatives sincerely.

43 For the expression of impartiality as a means by which ancient historians construct authority see Marincola 1997, 158–174.

44 This promise is not fulfilled in several instances in the third hexad; see Koestermann 1968, 122 and Syme 1958, 291 n. 4, who speculate that Tacitus had not yet completely finished or revised these books. Develin 1983, 84, by contrast, points out that Tacitus did not have to make a promise that he would not carry out later: "He has led us to believe that he follows a practice which he can hardly have followed. There are a few variants in later passages, but names are named only three times. Why no names in other instances? For example, A. 14.9. Names might spoil the impression."

plausible by contending that Poppaea had reproached him for coming back home late when she was pregant and ill (Suet. *Ner.* 35.3).

The disconcertion in Tacitus, which is caused even though the narrator officially and explicitly expresses his preference for one alternative, brings us to passages in which the narrator also prefers one of two alternative versions, but in which it is the preference expressed that itself causes uncertainty. Thus, when Nero introduces the innovative Greek-style *Neronia* games, an important medium for his representation as artist, opinions about these games are mixed (*varia fama*, *Ann.* 14.20.1). Tacitus reports arguments against the *Neronia* first (*Ann.* 14.20). Arguments supportive of the *Neronia* follow (*Ann.* 14.21): they are introduced by the unfavourable comment that most people liked the permissive climate (*pluribus ipsa licentia placebat*), but put forward respectable terms for it (*ac tamen honesta nomina praetendebant*) (*Ann.* 14.21.1). In his commentary on the *Annals* Erich Koestermann reads this statement as an attempt by Tacitus to present the arguments of those in favour of the new Greek games neutrally, but in which nevertheless Tacitus' own negative attitude towards this novelty breaks through.[45] I rather read Tacitus' play with variants here as preventing closure and causing disconcertion: the reader is first prepared to understand arguments in favour of the *Neronia* as hollow excuses for licentious behaviour. However, despite this introduction these arguments turn out to be quite rational. What is more, the narrator concedes that the spectacle ended with no obvious scandal (*nullo insigni dehonestamento*, *Ann.* 14.21.4).[46] And while many people had worn Greek clothing at the event, it fell out of fashion afterwards (*Ann.* 14.21.4). Neither the feared wantonness nor foreignness, as first expressed in the arguments against the *Neronia* (*abolitos paulatim patrios mores funditus everti per accitam lasciviam, ut … degeneretque studiis externis iuventus*, *Ann.* 14.20.4), have become reality. The reader is thus left at least a little disconcerted about how to evaluate the arguments pro and contra.

A position that at first seems clear and proven may also be weakened, for example, when talking about different versions of the Pisonian conspiracy: Tacitus reports that Gaius Plinius presented another version of the events, in which Antonia, Claudius' daughter, was part of the conspiracy (*Ann.* 15.53.3).

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45 See Koestermann 1968, 65: "Wenn sich auch Tacitus bemüht, den Befürwortern der Neuerung objektiv Gehör zu schenken, so tritt doch in den einleitenden Worten seine eigene negative Einstellung ziemlich unverhüllt zutage."

46 Syme and Koestermann propose different explanations to legitimize this inconsistency. According to Syme 1958, 516 these are now sober arguments in favour. Koestermann explains Tacitus' concession by his fully developed understanding of poetry and art and an attitude that appreciates not only the past, but also the present times (see Koestermann 1968, 67).

Pliny's version seems *absurdum* (*Ann.* 15.53.4) to Tacitus, with Antonia giving her name to and taking the risk for a forlorn hope and with Piso committing himself to another marriage, although, as everyone knew, he was much in love with his wife. But just when Pliny's version seems weakened by these explanations, Tacitus has a restriction follow in the form of a *nisi*-clause that casts doubt on the assertion just made. For the narrator states that his assumptions are correct—unless the desire to rule burns hotter than all other feelings: *nisi si cupido dominandi cunctis adfectibus flagrantior est* (*Ann.* 15.53.4). As Tacitus' own narratives in the *Annals* have given abundant examples supporting this thesis, we are disconcerted about what to make of his, at first sight, seemingly clear explanation. Closure of interpretation is, again, not possible.

Besides these explicit choices of alternative versions there are also implicit decisions, in which the narrator merely suggests that he prefers one version. Where there is no direct comment by the narrator, as in the passages just discussed, uncertainty and disconcertion are always to a certain degree inherent in the implicit choices, already on the surface of the formulation. But meaning can be conveyed in other ways: the reader is often guided by the position of a version—the last being more powerful and emphatic and better remembered in a process of argumentation—or by the length or degree of elaboration, or by its context.[47] The best known example of this technique of indirect emphasis is probably the so-called *Totengericht* of Augustus, the evaluation of him as emperor, which is presented first from a positive perspective and then from a negative one (*Ann.* 1.9–10). The critical view is emphasized: it is put second and given more space.[48]

We quite often find this disposition of two versions with the second carrying the punch. When Tiberius and Livia do not appear in public after the death of Germanicus, the first explanation, given as a fact in the text, is that they considered open grief beneath their imperial dignity (*inferius maiestate sua rati, si palam lamentarentur*, *Ann.* 3.3.1). The second, introduced by an innocent *an*, fits much better into Tacitus' narrative and depiction of Tiberius and Livia.[49]

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47 Cf. again Whitehead 1979, 493: when Tacitus loads the choice between alternatives, it is virtually always towards the second. See Develin 1983, 85–87 for examples in Tacitus in which the second alternative is suggestive. Cf. Döpp 1985, 156 n. 18 on *sive-sive* in *Agr.* 40.2; 42.4; 43.3: "Das zweite Glied, das sich dem Leser naturgemäß stärker einprägt als das frühere, pflegt in Umfang und Aussage besonderes Gewicht zu haben—auch dies ein Mittel der 'Sympathielenkung'."

48 See Ryberg 1942, 387 on the statements about both Augustus and Tiberius: "the unfavourable judgments are given in much greater detail, are placed last, and allowed to stand, with no correction, in the position of a final summing up".

49 Cf. Whitehead 1979, 494, describing the results of his statistical analysis of Tacitus' text: "It

They did not want people closely examining their demeanour and detecting that they were insincere: *an ne omnium oculis vultum eorum scrutantibus falsi intellegerentur* (*Ann.* 3.3.1). As Tacitus' Tiberius and Livia are very likely to be responsible for Germanicus' death, it seems much more plausible that they did not want to be watched by everyone lest their hypocrisy be detected. There is also a clear implied preference in the case of the explanation for Burrus' death, created this time by both the disposition and the length of the passages. The narrator ostensibly leaves it open whether Burrus died of illness or poison: *incertum valetudine an veneno* (*Ann.* 14.51.1). But while the reason for the illness-hypothesis is briefly stated, the one about the poison develops into a lively story that makes it appear much more probable (*Ann.* 14.51.1–2).[50]

In both cases just mentioned the second version is introduced by a disjunction. Such constructions with *seu*, *sive*, *an*, *aut*, *vel* abound in Tacitus when he gives two versions and puts emphasis on the second alternative.[51] The grammatical structure then implies a "structural neutrality".[52] The trick of presenting exactly two alternatives is that it makes us forget that a third version or explanation may also be possible.[53] We feel as if we have to choose between these two only. The text is 'closed' to a certain agree; it is not open to a third variant. When the Tacitean Nero trembles in the temple of Vesta he does so, we are told, either because the goddess filled him with terror (*seu numine exterrente*) or because he was never free from fear due to consciousness of his crimes (*seu facinorum recordatione numquam timore vacuus*) (*Ann.* 15.36.2). The profane idea that he merely slipped or stumbled is not supposed to come to mind; the second alternative, again, seems most attractive given the development of the narrative. Or, to take an example from Tacitus' Domitian, the fact that he inquires after Agricola's health by sending freedmen and doctors more often than was usual is interpreted as either concern or, much more probably given his role in the *Agricola*, an investigation, the second alternative in the *sive-sive* construction (*sive cura illud sive inquisitio*, *Agr.* 43.2).

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is, however, clear, that *an* is his favourite, both overall and when he wanted to place emphasis on the alternative which the 'or'-word introduces."

50 Since Suetonius (*Ner.* 35.5) and Cassius Dio (62.13.3) clearly favour the poison-version, Koestermann 1968, 122 attributes Tacitus' inclusion of the alternative (that Burrus died of ill health) to the historian's objectivity. Again, I read the inclusion of an alternative that produces uncertainty, and which is later deconstructed either implicitly or explicitly as implausible, as a technique for causing disconcertion.

51 Cf. Develin 1983, 85 on constructions with *seu*, *an*, *aut*, and *vel*.

52 This is Whitehead's term (see Whitehead 1979, 475).

53 Cf. Develin 1983, 86.

Reporting another reproach to Domitian that illustrates his enmity towards Agricola, Tacitus contends that this reproach was either true or invented to fit the *princeps*' character (*sive verum istud, sive ex ingenio principis fictum ac compositum est*, *Agr.* 40.2). The stress is, again, on the second *sive*-notion, which underlines Domitian's negative personality even more: Domitian's character suits hostile reproaches, be they true or not. The first alternative would not be a good one (the reproach would still be true), but the second carries the point Tacitus is making further: even if the reproach is not true, Domitian's character is still bad. We can see here that a second alternative can be worse than a first one that was already quite bad. Similarly, after Tiberius has been presented as the murderer of Sempronius Gracchus, the lover of Augustus' daughter Julia, a second version of events claims (*quidam … tradidere*) that he had Lucius Asprenas, proconsul of Africa, send the soldiers to kill Sempronius so that the murder could be blamed on Lucius (*Ann.* 1.53.6). This second version adds detail to the first one: two bad alternatives do not have to be exclusive. This is also illustrated by Tacitus' reasons for why Tiberius misses a gladiatorial performance (*Ann.* 1.76.4): according to some (*alii*), he was sick of crowds; others (*quidam*) referred to his morose temperament and his fear of comparison with Augustus, who had been a good-humoured spectator.

So far, the indirect preferences for one version among two alternatives presented do not really surprise the reader, if we accept the pattern that the second or last alternative usually carries the punch. There are, however, some instances in which the order of the alternatives runs counter to our expectations. When Tiberius' lack of concern regarding the situation in Gaul and Germany is explained by either his deep reserve or the fact that he knew that the incidents were minor and less serious than commonly reported (*altitudine animi, an compererat modica esse et vulgatis leviora*, *Ann.* 3.44.4), the second alternative is definitely more positive for him than the first. The first, however, makes the standard reproach of his reserve, which we would expect to be true. Likewise, when Tiberius is depicted as not approving of one of Germanicus' military actions, the first explanation given is based on the standard reproach of Tiberius' general negative attitude towards Germanicus; the second explanation, though, presents the reasoning of an experienced military leader, who is afraid of the demoralization of his troops: *quod Tiberio haud probatum, seu cuncta Germanici in deterius trahenti, sive exercitum imagine caesorum insepultorumque tardatum ad proelia et formidolosiorem hostium credebat* ("Tiberius did not approve. Perhaps he looked at everything that Germanicus did in a negative light, or perhaps he believed that, after the sight of dead and unburied soldiers, the army would be reluctant to do battle and would be more fearful

of the enemy", *Ann.* 1.62.2).[54] This unexpected position of a (somewhat) positive alternative is also found in the description of Nero's last meeting with his mother and his clinging closely to her before the planned murder attack: either he was continuing his show right to the end, or else the last sight of his mother, who was about to die, caught his heart, however inhuman it was (*sive explenda simulatione, seu pe⟨ri⟩turae matris supremus adspectus quamvis ferum animum retinebat, Ann.* 14.4.4).[55] In *Agr.* 42.2 the second alternative at least allows for Domitian's consciousness of guilt: Tacitus' Domitian does not grant the proconsular salary to Agricola either because he was offended that it was not requested, as was obviously the regular procedure,[56] or else as a result of his conscience, so that he did not appear to have bought something that he had forbidden[57] (*sive offensus non petitum, sive ex conscientia, ne quod vetuerat videretur emisse*).

Passages like these, in which the text does not give consistent clues about which alternative is to be preferred, again prevent closure and cause disconcertion. If the reader accepts the pattern by which the second, longer alternative carries most weight, they do not fit into the overall negative images created of Nero, Domitian, and Tiberius. They even weaken some standard motifs of interpretation, such as Tiberius' secrecy and hatred for Germanicus and Nero's inhuman heart. It would cause less cognitive dissonance to the reader to prefer the first alternative in these cases. But this would imply a weakening of the pattern by which the second alternative tends to be presented as stronger, and at least cause disconcertion in reading some passages in which it is not clear which alternative the narrator prefers.

Such an impression is stronger when the narrator does not express a preference for an alternative at all, neither explicitly nor implicitly. We have seen above that the story about Bassus' gold ends with two uncommented alternatives: either Bassus killed himself or he was imprisoned, then released, and his property was seized as compensation for a royal treasure (*Ann.* 16.3.2).[58] The

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54 Cf. Koestermann 1963, 214.

55 Again, Koestermann does not read this as an act of disconcerting the reader, as I do, but as an argument for the psychological and human quality of Tacitus: according to Koestermann 1968, 32 this second alternative speaks "nicht nur für das psychologische Einfühlungsvermögen des Tacitus, sondern nicht minder für sein Bedürfnis, sogar einer so abartigen Persönlichkeit wie Nero menschlich irgendwie gerecht zu werden".

56 Cf. Woodman 2014, 300.

57 See Woodman 2014, 301: "what Domitian had forbidden was A.'s sortition for the proconsulship of Africa or Asia (…); if he had nevertheless given him a proconsular salary, he might be said to have bought him off."

58 See p.91.

presentation of alternatives without expressing a preference is especially startling when the alternatives are in stark contrast, as when talking about Tiberius and Livia and not knowing whether their actions were driven by harmony or hidden hatred (*concordia sive occultis odiis*, Ann 3.64.1).[59] The narrator's openness can be underlined by terms such as *incertum* or by other clear statements of impartiality (e.g. *quorum neutrum adseverarim*, *Ann.* 3.16.1).[60] Tacitus leaves it open whether Nero praised the dead Agrippina's beauty or not (*sunt qui crediderint, sunt qui abnuant*, *Ann.* 14.9.1) and whether Agrippina's freedman Mnester killed himself through affection for her or through fear of execution (*incertum caritate in patronam an metu exitii*, *Ann.* 14.9.2).

Uncertainty is even expressed in fundamental statements about the historian's methods and results. The narrator underlines, in the context of Germanicus' death, that the truth even of the most important events cannot be established (*maxima quaeque ambigua sunt*, *Ann.* 3.19.2). He is even uncertain whether human life is determined by fate, immutable inevitability, or chance: *in incerto iudicium est fatone res mortalium et necessitate immutabili an forte volvantur* (*Ann.* 6.22.1).[61] But, as mentioned above, we should not take expressions of uncertainty as a clear criterion of the narrator's objectivity or innocence.[62] Once a version of an event has been mentioned, it cannot be deleted from the mind of the reader, no matter how strong the confession of uncertainty may be. And no matter how strong the expression of uncertainty may be, as in the case of Germanicus' death just mentioned, the depiction until this point has been so vivid that we think we can read into Tacitus that Tiberius had had his nephew killed with the help of Piso.[63] This relation between expres-

59 The formulation of the alternatives is further emphasized by the brevity of the expression (contrasting the preceding colon) and the assonance, cf. Koestermann 1963, 544.

60 For the formula *incertum an* in Tacitus and the 14 text passages in which it is used see Suerbaum 2015, 107–116.

61 Whitehead categorizes this alternative in the group of alternatives with "emphasis probably or certainly on first alternative", but this emphasis only becomes apparent later: "But after discussing this, Tacitus seems to agree with *plurimi* that it is the first" (Whitehead 1979, 478).

62 See also Develin 1983, 66–68 on *incertum* and Develin 1983, 70 on other expressions of uncertainty.

63 See Ries 1969, 187–188 on this passage, citing Friedrich Leo's reading experience ("Noch heute werden die meisten Leser des Tacitus meinen, bei ihm gelesen zu haben, daß Tiberius den Germanicus habe durch Piso vergiften lassen [...]", Ries 1969, 188; cf. Walker 1952, 116); and Ries 1969, 181–183 on the reader preferring the version of *Ann.* 3.16.1 to *Ann.* 3.15.3. Cf. Ryberg 1942, 395: Tacitus has "established the suspicion of poison by stating Germanicus' belief in it, and his own impartiality by stating the lack of any evidence for it".

sions of (un)certainty by the narrator and the disconcertion of the reader can be further illustrated by Tacitus' famous depiction of the Great Fire of Rome (*Ann.* 15.38–44).

Tacitus' presentation of the Great Fire (*Ann.* 15.38–44) is an excellent example of Tacitus' play with uncertainty over events. It is introduced by the statement that it is unclear whether this disaster happened accidentally or by a scheme of Nero: *forte an dolo principis incertum* (*Ann.* 15.38.1).[64] Both versions have been recorded by authors, so Tacitus: *nam utrumque auctores prodidere* (*Ann.* 15.38.1). This uncertainty is not explicitly dissolved in the following description. The depiction of the start of the fire, of the ideal site for the fire to break out, and of people's behaviour points to neither one nor the other version (*Ann.* 15.38.2–6). It is presented as a fact that no one dared fight the fire because there were repeated threats by many people who forebade extinguishing it, and others openly threw firebrands and yelled that they were acting on someone's command. Tacitus' comment on this assertion is again formulated as an alternative. They did this either in order to loot more freely or because they really had been given the order (*sive ut raptus licentius exercerent seu iussu*, *Ann.* 15.38.7). The stress is on the short second alternative, *iussu*, pointing to Nero. The narrative now switches to him and his name is mentioned for the first time (*Ann.* 15.39.1). We learn that Nero had been in Antium when the fire broke out and that he only returned to Rome when the fire threatened his palace. The Palatium, his palace, and the area surrounding it burn down (*Ann.* 15.39.1). Tacitus' Nero takes some measures that have popular appeal: he opens the Campus Martius, the monuments of Agrippa, and his own gardens to the homeless and displaced, he erects makeshift buildings, has vital supplies shipped to Rome, and lowers the price of grain (*Ann.* 15.39.2). But just when we might be inclined to favour Nero for his actions, these potentially positive measures are said to have been in vain (*in inritum cadebant*, *Ann.* 15.39.3). As reason for this failure a rumour is cited that had spread: it claimed that just when the city was in flames Nero had appeared on his private stage and sung of the destruction of Troy, comparing the present evil and the old disasters (*quia pervaserat rumor ipso tempore flagrantis urbis inisse eum domesticam scaenam et cecinisse Troianum excidium, praesentia mala vetustis cladibus adsimulantem*, *Ann.* 15.39.3). This is presented

64 Cf. Ryberg 1942, 398–400; cf. Yavetz 1975 on this passage, who points out that Tacitus, by maintaining the appearance of objectivity ("Yet everything was written according to the rules of a respectable sceptical point of view, and no one could accuse Tacitus of lying", Yavetz 1975, 183), manages to incriminate both Nero and the Christians (see *Ann.* 15.44.2) here; cf. Yavetz 1975, 194: "Tacitus did not conceal the truth. He did not know it, and made no special attempt to pretend it. With a malicious 'objective' smile he laughs at Nero and the Christians equally."

only as rumour by the narrator, not as a historical fact. But the mental image of Nero singing while Rome burns is so striking that doubt about its historicity is pushed into the background.

After a short halt the fire breaks out again (*Ann.* 15.40.1). Two reasons are given why this new fire causes more ill fame for Nero (*plusque infamiae, Ann.* 15.40.2). The first is that the fire broke out on Tigellinus' estates, as is stated as a fact; the second reason given is that it seemed to be the case (*videbaturque*) that Nero was seeking glory in founding a new city and giving it his name (*Ann.* 15.40.2). That the second reason is not presented as a fact is almost forgotten by its close connection to the first 'factual' reason. The description of the great extent of the destruction that follows (*Ann.* 15.41) can now be read as something that suits Nero's purposes and not as something that the *princeps* would have lamented. This reading of the massive destruction is immediately supported:[65] Nero is, finally, said to have used the ruins of his city to construct his new palace (*ceterum Nero usus est patriae ruinis exstruxitque domum, Ann.* 15.42.1), and this is given no longer as a hypothesis or a rumour, but as a simple fact. The description of the palace illustrates that it needed much space, space that was created by the fire (*Ann.* 15.42.1; 15.43.1). The rest of Nero's building measures (*Ann.* 15.43) appear in the light of the impression that he wanted to build his own new city *Neronia*. In the long run, nothing Nero does can stop the negative report that the fire was thought to have been ordered (*infamia, quin iussum incendium crederetur, Ann.* 15.44.2). In order to dismiss this rumour (*abolendo rumori*) Nero searches for another culprit and blames the Christians (*Ann.* 15.44.2). Whether the rumour is true or not is, again, not stated, but Tacitus' Nero wants to get rid of it. The reader may now be inclined to think that this supports the truth of the rumour;[66] if not, it at least shows Tacitus' Nero once more destroying the life of innocent people for his own good.

We can see that rumour plays an important part in the narrative twice (*Ann.* 15.39.3; 15.44.2).[67] In general, rumour as a narrative device allows the narrator to present an opinion without giving a source, while maintaining a distance from the content of the rumour. Rumour also has an important narrative function, as it makes people take action, as we observed.[68] But rumour also fulfils an

65 Cf. p.67–69 on Nero's building endeavours as a topic of deconstruction.

66 Cf. Develin 1983, 91: "The fact that Nero wanted to stop the rumour creates an impression of its possible validity".

67 On this rumour see also Flaig 2014, 276–280, whose analysis claims that the rumour was so successful because Nero was not personally present at the site of the fire (cf. already Yavetz 1975, 193).

68 The narrator states that rumour makes decent people do bad things (*Ann.* 2.55.6). Another

important argumentative function. Something can be innocently introduced as a rumour and thus as an unevaluated element which does not have to be 'true'. But the development of the narrative can slowly build on that rumour so that it ultimately becomes an important part of the argument.[69] In the *Agricola* for example, Domitian's poisoning Agricola is introduced only as rumour (*rumor veneno interceptum*, *Agr.* 43.2). But this rumour is not only qualified as *constans*, it is also strongly supported, almost 'proven' by Domitian's behaviour and depiction in the following passage, in which he is described as joyful and as only feigning his grief over Agricola's death (*Agr.* 43.2–4). For the narrative and the plausibility of the events depicted it is less important whether Tacitus really believed some rumours and disregarded others.[70] More important for the persuasiveness of his presentation is the function of the rumour for the development of the narrative and the argument. Rumours do not have to be true and Tacitus does not have to consider them to be true. Rumours tell us something about how people felt and how they perceived the world.[71] Emotions and perceptions can determine the cause of events in the same way that 'facts' can.[72] But it is Tacitus' decision to integrate them into his narrative.[73]

To return to the Fire of Rome: until the end there is no clear statement that Nero had the city burnt. However, it is especially the *cui bono* argument, carefully developed within the text, that points to Nero as organizer of the fire. To draw attention to the profit that a person gained from an event is a rhetor-

example of a rumour making an emperor react is provided by Tiberius' visiting the senate because he wants to deflect from rumours that he aims to cast down Agrippina (*Ann.* 4.55.1). For functions of rumour in Tacitus see the study of Ries 1969 on *Agr.* 39–43; *Hist.* 1.4–49; *Hist.* 1.50.1–3; *Ann.* 1.4.2–5; *Ann.* 2.39–40.

69 Cf. Ryberg 1942, 389: "Most remarkable of all is the device of giving credence to such charges,—presented originally in the form of rumours, quotations, or unsupported alternatives,—by referring to them later in the narrative as if they were established fact." See also Ryberg 1942, 397; 403.

70 See Develin 1983, 78: "Tacitus believes rumour when it suits him."

71 Cf. Pelling 2009b, 163.

72 As Gibson 1998, 113 has pointed out, "rumour can itself have a causative role. In other words, perceptions about an event or a character can, regardless of their veracity, influence and determine the course of subsequent events". See also Suerbaum 2015, 192–195 for rumour as a literary device applied by Tacitus.

73 I hence do not agree with positions that separate Tacitus' true account of history from the rumours he does not want to be responsible for, such as Ryberg 1942, summarized at the beginning of this section. See also e.g. Aubrion 1985, 725: "la large utilisation des rumeurs et des commentaires anonymes favorise les procès d'intention, mais elle corrige les insuffisances de l'histoire officielle et donne la parole aux rebelles et aux contestataires".

ical technique.[74] It operates on the logic that the situation after an event may explain what actions and motives led to this situation. In Tacitus we are told by and by that Nero took up the opportunity of the fire for an artistic performance (presented in the text as a rumour: *rumor*, *Ann.* 15.39.3); that he planned a new city bearing his name (seemingly, according to the text: *videbaturque*, *Ann.* 15.40.2); and that he took advantage of the destruction (given as a fact in the text: *usus est*, *Ann.* 15.42.1). The grade of facticity thus moves from rumour to appearance to fact. As it anyway could not be proven that Nero really was responsible for the fire, we can consider the uncertainty that the narrator confesses to be part of the rhetorical structure of the passage. This way, the reader does not feel forced to accept a version presented as clear that could not be clear. He will instead draw the conclusion himself.

2.2 *Excursus on Alternative Times: Contemporary and Past Times in the Preface to the* Agricola

An example of another kind of disconcertion can be found in the opening passage of the *Agricola* (1–3), Tacitus' first work, written in 97 or 98 CE. The disconcertion concerns Tacitus' attitude towards and description of Nerva's and Trajan's reigns and is caused by expressions of time that are not completely clear. There are three different layers of time in the preface: a distant past, namely the Republic, especially the late Republic of the first century BCE; a recent past, namely the reign of Domitian; and the present time under Nerva and Trajan. When Tacitus starts by saying that it was custom "in past times" (*antiquitus*) to relate the deeds and characters of famous men, he has Republican times in mind (*Agr.* 1.1). These are contrasted to his own times (*ne nostris quidem temporibus*), in which people are indifferent to their contemporaries. This contrast is further developed when he compares biographies and autobiographies of Republican times (*apud priores*, *Agr.* 1.2–3) to his own situation (*Agr.* 1.4). He, who was going to relate a dead man's life (*nunc narraturo mihi*, *Agr.* 1.4), needed a reprieve that he would not have sought had he been about to make criticisms[75]—so savage and hostile to virtues were these times (*tam saeva et infesta virtutibus tempora*, *Agr.* 1.4).

This interpretation of the very beginning of the *Agricola* is in accord with the following passages, where both the harsh criticism of Domitian (*Agr.* 2) and the praise of Nerva and Trajan (*Agr.* 3) are unambiguous.[76] However, when

74 See, for example, the *cui bono* argument in Cicero's *Pro Sexto Roscio* and its forceful disposition, with Stroh 1975, 68–69; 79.

75 Cf. Woodman 2014, 75.

76 Cf. Woodman 2014, 65–70; 74–76, who also reads *nostris … temporibus/aetas* (*Agr.* 1.1),

we start reading the *Agricola*, unaware of these later passages, not all of the expressions mentioned above will clearly denote the reign of Domitian. His "own times" (*nostris ... temporibus*, *Agr.* 1.1) could at least include, even if not meaning exclusively, the present time when he is writing the *Agricola*, i.e. the reigns of Nerva and Trajan. The *nunc* in *nunc narraturo mihi* (*Agr.* 1.4) could naturally refer to Tacitus' present times. *fuit* would then refer to the past from the point of view of the reader.[77] The following expression *tam saeva et infesta virtutibus tempora* (*Agr.* 1.4) even lacks the verb *erant* (referring to Domitian's times)—or does it lack the verb *sunt* (referring to Nerva and Trajan)?[78]

As mentioned already, the following passages (*Agr.* 2–3) provide closure and solve this ambiguity by clearly contrasting Domitian's tyrannical regime to Nerva and Trajan's happy and blessed times.[79] Also, the parallel structure of this passage (*Agr.* 1) supports this interpretation, since the contrasting pair *antiquitus*—*nostris temporibus* (*Agr.* 1.1) is mirrored by *apud priores* (*Agr.* 1.2)—*nunc* (*Agr.* 1.4). It is still true, though, that when reading this passage for the first time, the expressions *nostris ... temporibus* (*Agr.* 1.1), *nunc* (*Agr.* 1.4), and *tam saeva et infesta virtutibus tempora* with its missing verb (*Agr.* 1.4) could have been formulated less ambiguously. It is hard to believe that Tacitus was not aware of the disconcertion that his formulations would cause. He must at least be taking into account the fact that his readers may relate some of his descriptions of bad times to the contemporary reigns of Nerva and Trajan.[80]

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nunc narraturo mihi ... fuit (*Agr.* 1.4), and *tempora* (*Agr.* 1.4) as referring to Domitian's reign.

77 Cf. Woodman 2014, 74, who mentions this possible reading, but prefers *fuit* as past from the point of view of the author, and so as referring to Domitian's reign.

78 Cf. Sailor 2008, 58–59, arguing for ambiguity in this passage: "This ambiguity permits a link between the conditions of public discourse under Domitian and those that prevail in the present" (Sailor 2008, 59).

79 Tacitus expresses a positive attitude to his own times not only in *Agr.* 3 but also in *Ann.* 3.55.5, which contrasts with the atmosphere as analysed for the era of Nero and Domitian on p.90–93.

80 For those interested in the author Tacitus, it is tempting to see this analysis of the beginning of the *Agricola* in the context of Tacitus' attitude to the last Flavian and to Nerva and Trajan, as expressed in later works. (The famous *tam diu Germania vincitur* and *proximis temporibus triumphati magis quam victi sunt* in *Germ.* 37 can be read as criticism of Trajan and Nerva [see Seelentag 2004, 138–139, cf. 152–154]. If in the *Histories* [*Hist.* 4.39–45] the first senate meeting is read as presenting parallels between Nero/Domitian and Vespasian/Trajan, the criticism of Vespasian must also apply to Trajan [esp. *Hist.* 4.42.5–6]. The honours given to Nerva [and Tigellinus] as reward for their role in destroying the Pisonian conspiracy are not passed over [*Ann.* 15.72.1]. There is also more general criticism on the contemporary times in *Ann.* 3.18.3–4 [in the context of Claudius' unexpected path to power, Tacitus remarks on the farcical nature of human affairs, which applies not

3 Playing with Oppositions

3.1 *Binary Oppositions: Creating Perversion and Dilemmas*

A special case of variants or alternatives are binary oppositions. Opposites, such as 'good' and 'bad' or 'normal' and 'abnormal', 'free' and 'slave', or 'man' and 'woman', help to give orientation: they provide a system, for example of goodness, normality, freedom, or gender, into which single elements can be pigeonholed. Whether a person is good or bad, striving for utility or honour, free or slave, man or woman, or also poor or rich, present or absent, and whether a situation is conceived of as normal or abnormal makes a significant difference for anyone who has to interpret the behaviour of people and the atmosphere of a situation, as Tacitus' readers and Tacitus himself must do. The most important binary opposition for the historian is that of truth and falsehood. Tacitus presents this opposition clearly and distinguishes the ways by which truth and falsehood each acquire strength. Truth gains strength from sight and the passage of (enough) time, deception gains strength from haste and things that are unclear: *quia veritas visu et mora, falsa festinatione et incertis valescunt* (*Ann.* 2.39.4). The clear antithesis of *veritas* and *falsa*, the assonances in *veritas visu* and *falsa festinatione*, and the parallel construction of *visu et mora* and *festinatione et incertis*, including also the chiasmus of *visu*/*incertis* and *mora*/*festinatione*, all support the idea that truth and deception can in fact be distinguished

only to older history but also to recent times], and *Ann.* 12.43.2 [where the criticism of Rome's dependence on Africa and Egypt regarding corn supply includes his own times].) Tacitus never wrote the work on the new dynasty that he promises first here in the *Agricola* (*Agr.* 3.3) in 97/98 CE and again about ten years later in the *Histories* (*Hist.* 1.1.4). In his last work, the *Annals*, he even claims to have plans for a work on Augustus (*Ann.* 3.24.3), which implies at least the delay of a work on Nerva/Trajan. Scholarship has widely debated whether this mirrors a change in Tacitus' attitude towards the ruling dynasty (see the overview in Suerbaum 2015, 547–563). It has also been observed that Tacitus' comments on his own relationship with Domitian develop over time (cf. Woodman 2009, 37–39). They become more and more candid. There is nothing about this relationship here in the *Agricola*. Roughly ten years later in the *Histories*, he concedes (*nec abnuerim*) that he was supported by Domitian (*Hist.* 1.1.3). Again some years later in the *Annals*—the precise dating is unknown—he mentions his own involvement in Domitian's Saecular Games of 88 CE. If one reads this as a process of 15 to 20 years in which Tacitus distances himself from Nerva (who was consul in 90 CE under Domitian) and Trajan (who was consul in 91 CE under Domitian) while more openly acknowledging his past under Domitian, the disconcertion detected in the preface of the *Agricola* would fit well with that notion. Tacitus would then be indirectly inciting the reader to wonder about the similarities and differences between Domitian and Nerva/Trajan. Tacitus' first work would be raising this question (*Agr.* 1.1) and then clearly answering it in the rest of that work. But his later works would not show so straightforward a distinction and would thus reflect a more balanced answer.

from one another. From a structuralist viewpoint, when trying to make sense of the world it is especially helpful to divide and analyse its single elements according to certain contrasts. Binary opposites help to order the world.[81] If they do not work, they disconcert.

This ordering function becomes especially evident in cases where the system of oppositions is somehow disturbed, for which we may study two examples. First, Tacitus depicts the horror and chaos during the Capitoline War by showing that opposing things were present at the same time: the cruel and distorted appearance of the whole city presents the contrast of fighting and wounded men beside baths and restaurants, of heaps of bleeding dead beside harlots and their ilk, of the vice and licence of luxurious peace to all the crime and horror of a captured town, of the image of the city as both furious and wanton at the same time: *saeva ac deformis urbe tota facies: alibi proelia et vulnera, alibi balineae popinaeque; simul cruor et strues corporum, iuxta scorta et scortis similes; quantum in luxurioso otio libidinum, quidquid in acerbissima captivitate scelerum, prorsus ut eandem civitatem et furere crederes et lascivire* (*Hist.* 3.83.2). Second, the importance of oppositions for structuring and understanding the world becomes apparent when one cannot rely on them anymore. Thus, Tacitus illustrates human helplessness against the natural power of a flood by the insignificance of conventional oppositions: in this extreme situation it makes no difference whether one is active or idle, prudent or incautious, whether one acts considerately or randomly: *nihil strenuus ab ignavo, sapiens ab imprudenti, consilia a casu differre* (*Ann.* 1.70.3).

We can further illustrate the disconcertion that antitheses can cause by differences of gender and status. We have seen above that we can construct the Tacitean image of what is characteristic of a man and a woman.[82] The same is true for the contrast between freeborn people and slaves. But we have also noted that, as gender is performed in the narrative, an emperor like Nero can be criticized by being ascribed female attributes. However, masculinity and femininity, and being slave or freeborn, are not clear and unambiguous patterns of interpretation in Tacitus. The behaviour of the slave Clemens, who pretends to be Agrippa Postumus, is explicitly analysed as untypical of a slave (*non servili animo*, *Ann.* 2.39.1). More often, figures break implicitly with the main rules that the text constructs for their gender. Their behaviour appears to be inconsistent with the norms that regularly apply to it. Agricola's particular masculinity, for

81 Figures in the narrative often "evaluate their situation as a conflict of utility and honorability" (van den Berg 2012, 205). See van den Berg 2012, 204–209 on the opposition of *honesta* and *utilia* in Tacitus (see esp. *Ann.* 4.33.2), which he reads as rhetorically influenced.

82 See p.102–103.

example, lies in his not fulfilling the classical manly norms stubbornly. Rather, his flexibility and his modesty allow him to become a model for his era.[83] All the patterns that help to order and analyse the world by social categories are broken by Epicharis, the hero of the Pisonian conspiracy mentioned above (*Ann.* 15.51; 57).[84] The reader would not expect too much of her, as a woman and slave/freedwoman.[85] But not only does her behaviour prove more manly and more freeborn than that of all the Romans involved in the conspiracy. She can even be seen as the only real conspirator among a group of people who merely play the roles of conspirators. She gives no dramatic speeches, she dies without histrionics, and betrays no one.[86] In certain important passages the reader is thus disconcerted over the patterns of interpretation constructed in and by other parts of the texts. Terms and concepts such as masculinity, freedom, and virtue are only at first sight unambiguous and stable.[87] The Tacitean texts illustrate the fact that viewing the world in dialectical concepts is not the approach needed in order to make sense of it or deduce normative guidelines for one's actions and behaviour.[88]

So far, we have seen that the play with oppositions in Tacitus is important both for establishing and for disrupting orientation, which results in a lack of closure and in uncertainty. Before we study more closely the strategies by which the text achieves this uncertainty through the use of oppositions, we should be aware that oppositions are also part of panegyrical literature. To praise the emperor, he is shown as uniting or combining things that are usually opposed to each other. Scholars have pointed out that Pliny's praise of Trajan in the *Panegyricus* works in this way. Pliny's Trajan unites in himself several paradoxes that are commonly conceived of as mutually exclusive, as binary oppo-

83 See Späth 2011, 136–139; Späth 2012, 439–440.

84 For women and slaves (under torture) as positive examples see *Hist.* 1.3.1.

85 Cf. the attack on both in this part of the narrative in *Ann.* 15.54.4 (*cum secum servilis animus praemia perfidiae reputavit*, "when the mind of a slave calculated the rewards of treachery"; *uxoris quoque consilium adsumpserat, muliebre ac deterius*, "he had also accepted his wife's advice, the advice of a woman and quite despicable").

86 Woodman 1993, 114–115 has analysed the difference between Epicharis and the other conspirators: unlike them she does not play the role of a conspirator, but is one (p.107); instead of using only empty words she really takes actions.

87 To problematize the content of seemingly self-evident terms (such as fortitude) and to demonstrate thereby the fragility of a linguistic norm can be considered a (Socratic) method that causes disconcertion. See Jäkel 1986, 14.

88 Cf. Jäkel on tragedy: Jäkel 1986, 13, discussing aporetic situations that cause disconcertion, sees an effect of Socratic-Platonic dialectic on the late tragedies, in which the intellectual who learned to conceive of the world in dialectical terms can no longer act unambiguously.

sites.[89] He is both a comrade of his fellow soldiers and their leader; both civilian in his behaviour towards his citizens and their accepted ruler.[90] Additionally, Trajan's sublimity is paradoxically based on his denial of the sublime.[91] There are similar strategies in Domitianic panegyrics. Martial for example applauds Domitian for honouring the past and the present. He celebrates the emperor for combining both time-levels: *sic nova dum condis, revocas, Auguste, priora: / debentur quae sunt quaeque fuere tibi* ("Thus, Augustus, while you found the new, you bring back the old. What is and what was is owed to you", Mart. 8.80.7–8). The panegyrical emperor fulfils all norms, even the contradictory ones; he solves normative dilemmas. By contrast, in the historiographical discourse there are two strategies that draw on oppositions in order to criticize the emperor, which function in two different ways. On the one hand, an emperor may be depicted as devaluing, destroying, or inverting oppositions, which thus no longer provide orientation, or which provide a new system of values. On the other hand, he may be described as pushing oppositions to extremes and as creating dilemmas, situations in which neither of the two opposites is helpful.

We have seen above that it is a form of deconstructing imperial behaviour to characterize the social logic as destroyed.[92] Such a perversion of norms can be understood as a reversal of vice and virtue. The institution that generates perverted norms best is the business of the accusers. Its effects are described in terms of an inversion of oppositions: poor men become rich (*ex pauperibus divites*), despised men become fearful (*ex contemptis metuendi*), and they bring ruin first to others and finally to themselves (*perniciem aliis ac postremum sibi invenere*) (*Ann.* 1.74.3). The system of *delationes* makes it impossible to distinguish between things that usually can and must be distinguished: one could not distinguish outsiders from family members (*neque discerneres alienos a coniunctis*), friends from strangers (*amicos ab ignotis*), recent acts from those of the dimly remembered past (*quid repens aut vetustate obscurum*) (*Ann.* 6.7.3). The system of *delatores* results in a lack of clear distinctions between stable oppositions, and so in a lack of orientation.

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89 By contrast, when Nero is described as soiled by things both permitted and not permitted (*per licita atque inlicita foedatus*, Ann. 15.37.4), this polarized expression is used to convey his unlimited debauchery.

90 See Rees 2001: Pliny's Trajan unites the paradoxes of *pudor* and *securitas*, he is both *commilito* and *imperator*, *privatus* and *princeps*, *optimus* and *aequatus*. Cf. Braund 1998, 63–65 on Pliny's depiction of Trajan as divine and not-divine.

91 Cf. Hutchinson 2011, 132 on "the paradoxical sublime which Trajan embodies, a sublime based on his denial of the sublime".

92 See p.127–129.

The deconstruction of social norms as attributed to the accusers, among others, and to Tacitus' bad emperors results in an atmosphere of instability and relativity, in which the oppositions of 'normal' and 'abnormal' are implicitly deconstructed too. This is the case when the narrator makes something seem normal that should be an exception, something that should be abnormal, because it ought to be evaluated as bad from the point of view of the prevailing social standards. The impression of the normality of bad things is achieved mainly by repetitions and monotony,[93] especially when depicting murders (*Ann.* 15.60; 15.69).[94] Tacitus makes this sort of monotony explicit when he apologizes for it (*Ann.* 16.16.1), or when he assumes that the reader needs some diversion from his depiction of a series of murder victims in Rome (*Ann.* 6.38.1). But it is also achieved by other forms of wording, for example when the murder of Junius Silanus is nonchalantly introduced as the first death of the new principate of Nero (*prima novo principatu mors*, *Ann.* 13.1.1), implying that there were deaths before and there will be deaths afterwards.[95] A complementary technique to mentioning several instances of bad behaviour that should be abnormal is to give only one negative example of things that have become normal although they ought to be exceptions. The negative example then stands for all the other negative examples that could be mentioned too, as in the banquet of Tigellinus (*ut exemplum referam*, *Ann.* 15.37.1).[96]

Normality is also stylized as abnormal when normal things are mentioned and their exceptionality is pointed out. One positive instance indicates all the negative examples that are not mentioned, but which have to be assumed as the foil against which the positive example is seen. Things that should be normal are pointed out for their singularity; what should not be normal appears common. In this sense Tacitus points out that true feelings are displayed after Germanicus' death (*nihil compositum in ostentationem*, *Ann.* 2.82.3), that Tiberius stuck to the truth (*neque dempsit aut addidit vero*, *Ann.* 3.47.1), that someone died a natural death (*Ann.* 6.10.3), and that Memmius Regulus, a potential rival of Nero's, was not killed by him (*Ann.* 14.47.1). The exceptionality of something

93 Cf. Walker 1952, 36; O'Gorman 2000, 145–146.

94 The impression of continued, numerous, or repeated murder and dying is also achieved e.g. at *Ann.* 6.19.2 (*iacuit immensa strages, omnis sexus, omnis aetas, inlustres ignobiles, dispersi aut aggerati*); *Ann.* 6.29.1 (*at Romae caede continua*).

95 See also p.92–93 on the dynamics of bad times.

96 The formulation *ut exemplum referam* further strengthens the impression of exemplarity, since in the *Annals* it appears only here. Cf. Woodman 1998, 171–172: "This statement, with its combination of the noun *exemplum* and a first-person verb, is unique in the *Annals*". Cf. my close reading of this passage on p.71–72.

that should be normal for an emperor need not be stated explicitly: narrative order too can single out a positive event and embed it in a negative context or chain of events, from which it provides only brief relief. After a series of sad events in book 4 follows one pleasant event (C. Cominius, *Ann.* 4.31.1), in which Tiberius is presented positively. After the narrator's thoughts on historiography and the episode of Cremutius Cordus (*Ann.* 4.32–35), the series of accusations continues again (*Ann.* 4.36.1). Tiberius is also depicted in a positive light after a fire (*Ann.* 6.45), but as negative directly afterwards, when electing successors (*Ann.* 6.46). After the exceptionally positive event involving Thrasea's *libertas*, which breaks the other senators' servility (*Ann.* 14.49.1), there follow only extremely bad events, namely the death of Burrus, the downfall of Seneca, the death of Sulla and Plautus, the exile and death of Octavia. The atmosphere created in the text is never really 'closed'.

Whereas in the cases just discussed regular social oppositions are destroyed and have become dysfunctional, the second strategy of critique involving oppositions is based on maintaining oppositions but taking them to extremes, and on the dilemmas they create. In some instances, neither of two oppositions or extremes is helpful, which only underlines the hopelessness of a situation. With respect to Tacitus' Tiberius, we learn, neither being good nor being bad is helpful, since Tiberius feared danger for himself from the best people and disgrace to the state from the worst (*ex optimis periculum sibi, a pessimis dedecus publicum metuebat*, *Ann.* 1.80.2). Tacitus' Tiberius fears liberty and hates flattery (*sub principe, qui libertatem metuebat, adulationem oderat*, *Ann.* 2.87), which creates a dilemma over how to communicate with him.[97] With regard to Nero the senate and the most eminent citizens are depicted as uncertain whether Nero should be considered fiercer when he is far away or when he is close (*senatus et primores in incerto erant, procul an coram atrocior haberetur*, *Ann.* 15.36.4). In the end, they consider the worse to be what actually happened. The opposition of 'present' and 'absent' here underlines the desperation of the senate facing the *princeps*. The dilemma cannot be solved. Nero is bad no matter whether he is present or absent.

3.2 *Between 'Good' and 'Bad'*

Especially when the binary system of 'good' and 'bad' is weakened to the point of non-existence, this causes uncertainty, since the demonstration of the lack of absolute virtue and vice in the text makes it more difficult to find moral orientation. There is no doubt in panegyrical literature: Nero and Domitian are

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97 Cf. p.95 n.6.

absolutely perfect and good.[98] By contrast, there is no absolute 'goodness' or 'badness' in Tacitus. At several places the text points both explicitly and implicitly to the relativity of virtues, of concepts of 'good' and 'bad'. The atmosphere in the *Annals* is influenced by this depiction of virtues as something unstable.[99] They are depicted as relative over time. Something that was done well in the past is not appreciated forever, for example when emotions about a person change. 'Good' and 'bad' then appear as relative concepts that depend on feelings. Thus, once Galba is hated, both his good and his bad deeds prompt a negative attitude towards him (*et inviso semel principi seu bene seu male facta parem invidiam adferebant*, *Hist.* 1.7.2). His severity (*severitas*) is re-coded in combination with love for Nero's *vitia*: it was once a quality admired and set high in soldiers' estimation (*laudata olim et militari fama celebrata*), but now it only annoys troops whose contempt for the old discipline had been fostered by fourteen years of service under Nero, so that they had come to love the emperors' vices as much as they had formerly feared their virtues: *angebat aspernantes veterem disciplinam atque ita quattuordecim annis a Nerone adsuefactos, ut haud minus vitia principum amarent quam olim virtutes verebantur* (*Hist.* 1.5.2). Even a figure like Agrippina can appear positive after her death.[100] Her influence on Nero is seen in hindsight as something not only negative, since his timidity before her had also repressed his wantonness (*Ann.* 14.13.2). And for Octavia the time when Agrippina was still alive appears preferable afterwards, because then at least she herself had been able to stay alive (*et postremo Agrippinae nomen cieret, qua incolumi infelix quidem matrimonium, sed sine exitio pertulisset*, *Ann.* 14.64.1).

The disconcertion that this depiction of virtuous instability entails is supported by two narrative strategies, namely by an effective, disconcerting disposition and by the depiction of the relationship of speaker and content as disconcerting. Using both devices the text may show—often unexpectedly—that someone or something who is considered mostly bad is not only or always so, and the same is true for cases of being good. The text builds up patterns of interpretation and breaks them abruptly. This creates rather than resolves tensions, and works against the 'closure' of the text. That Nero is not only negative can

98 At least when we assume a 'preferred reading', cf. p.40.

99 Cf. p.90–93 on the atmosphere in the Tacitean text as opposed to panegyrical literature and p.127–129 on the depiction of perverted social norms.

100 Especially someone's death can be a turning point, as in the case of Vitellius, who is recoded by the people after he died: *et vulgus eadem pravitate insectabatur interfectum qua foverat viventem* ("and the mob abused him in his death with the same perverseness with which they had flattered him in his lifetime", *Hist.* 3.85.1).

be seen in the reactions after his death (*Hist.* 1.4.2; 1.8.2; 1.13.4). We also notice when not every opportunity for critique is seized by the narrator. The shameful appearance by aristocrats in the arena, for example, is not accompanied by criticism of Nero (*Ann.* 15.32).[101] In general, the disposition of the text makes the attitude towards a person, for example Nero, change during and following the reading process: in the depiction of Narcissus' death, we are first reminded of his struggle with Agrippina (*de cuius iurgiis adversus Agrippinam rettuli, Ann.* 13.1.3). Mentioning his pitiful imprisonment and his extreme sufferings before his sudden death makes him appear miserable. That his murder (formulated in the passive voice) was against Nero's will (*invito principe, Ann.* 13.1.3) hence casts Nero in a favourable light. But the sentence is not yet finished, and the following relative clause provides us with a reason for Nero's sympathy that changes Nero's positive image just mentioned: Narcissus' avarice and extravagance were admirably suited to Nero's then still hidden vices (*abditis adhuc vitiis, Ann.* 13.1.3). This radically alters the reader's impression of Nero within a single sentence.

The ambivalence of Tacitus' Tiberius, too, is brought out by the disposition of the narrative. His management of affairs after the earthquake in Sardis is depicted as good (*Ann.* 2.47), and even in treason trials his behaviour can be positive (*Ann.* 2.50). But these two instances of Tiberius as a good emperor are positioned within the narrative of Germanicus' death (cf. *Ann.* 2.42.1), which, as Tacitus insidiously suggests, was organized by Tiberius.[102] This embedding of positive examples into a negative context seems inconsistent and causes disconcertion. The same technique is applied in the narrative of the events following the downfall of Sejanus. At a time when nothing could be more dangerous than friendship with Sejanus a Roman knight, who is accused of this friendship, dares to confess it openly (*Ann.* 6.8).[103] The reader must be disconcerted by its outcome: the effect of his firm speech, which is acknowledged because it expresses what everyone thinks, is that his accusers are punished (*Ann.* 6.9.1). Illuminating the success of free speech and friendship with reference to Sejanus, of all people, is disconcerting at this point in the narrative and prevents closure with regard to the impression the text leaves about Sejanus.

Disconcerting too is the position of Tacitus' "clearest warning against belief in rumour",[104] uttered while defending Tiberius and Sejanus, an at best ambi-

101 Cf. p.75 on the *Iuvenalia* (*Ann.* 14.15.1).

102 Cf. p.122 on focalization, see also p.139–140.

103 For the danger of Sejanus' friendship see also *Ann.* 13.45.1.

104 Develin 1983, 77.

valent and a negative figure, against a rumour concerning the death of Drusus, a rather positive figure (*Ann.* 4.10–11). It is already remarkable that Tacitus chooses this of all rumours to voice his concern over them. But the disconcertion does not stop at the inconsistent relationship of the people involved and their defence. What is more, we can read this warning against rumour as failing to provide a standard for distinguishing rumour from truth, which it nevertheless purports to be.[105] The rumour to be refuted is absurd from the beginning, its refutation is therefore almost too easy (*haec vulgo iactata … facile refutaveris*, *Ann.* 4.11.1). The refutation of the rumour almost deconstructs itself. This section of text, which purports to help the reader distinguish true from false rumours, only augments the disconcertion over the role of rumours. It raises, rather than answers, questions about rumours, which makes the passage much more 'open' than 'closed'.[106]

Besides the disposition of the narrative or the position of a statement by the narrator within the narrative, the words and speeches of a figure in the narrative may be inconsistent and disconcerting. Sometimes they are not in accord with the overall picture that the narrator draws of that person. When Tacitus' Tiberius claims that what an emperor does and how he acts is more important for his memory than monuments built of stone (*haec mihi in animis vestra templa, hae pulcherrimae effigies et mansurae*, *Ann.* 4.38.2), it is surprising that Tiberius of all people thereby reminds the reader of the famous end of the *Agricola* in which Tacitus himself prefers mental images and morals over images of marble and bronze: … *non quia intercedendum putem imaginibus quae marmore aut aere finguntur, sed ut vultus hominum, ita simulacra vultus imbecilla ac mortalia sunt, forma mentis aeterna, quam tenere et exprimere non per alienam materiam et artem, sed tuis ipse moribus possis* ("… not because I think that any statues in marble or bronze should be banned. But, like the human face itself, images of the face are weak and perishable. The beauty of the soul lives forever, and you can preserve and express that beauty not by the material and artistry of another, but only in your own character", *Agr.* 46.3).[107] There are also examples in the *Histories*: that the principate under Vespasian is restricted in its freedom (*modum libertatis*, *Hist.* 4.8.4) is a reasonable statement, but it is uttered by the disagreeable Eprius Marcellus in a speech against Helvidius

105 See Ries 1969, 184–186, who argues that Tacitus demonstrates his critical method on a case which is not worth the effort, as well as being too easy to refute (cf. *Ann.* 4.11.1), and hence not suitable to provide readers with a general device for evaluating rumour.

106 Cf. Hardie 2009, 569 on *Ann.* 3.19.2, similarly showing that the rumours about Germanicus' death counteract the 'closure' of his death.

107 For the *imago vitae* cf. also Tacitus' Seneca at the moment of his death in *Ann.* 15.62.1.

Priscus. That Tacitus has this sentiment advanced by a speaker who cannot be favoured by the reader at this point of the narrative potentially causes disconcertion.

At the other extreme, there is no absolute goodness, or—if we take Agricola and also Germanicus into account—no goodness without danger.[108] Goodness and virtue only exist at high risk to one's life. Agricola is the only clear role model in Tacitus' texts (*Agr.* 4.3), something that of course also depends on the genre of biography. The *Agricola* develops a model of good behaviour towards a bad *princeps* (*Agr.* 42.3–4): we have already seen that Agricola's self-controlled moderation (*moderatio*) and practical judgment (*prudentia*) constantly mitigated Domitian's anger (*ira*) (*Agr.* 42.3).[109] This conduct is opposed to provoking fame and fate by defiance and an empty parade of freedom. Generalizing from the individual Agricola, Tacitus claims that compliance (*obsequium*) and moderation (*modestia*) in combination with assiduity (*industria*) and activity (*vigor*) lead to the same praise (*laus*) that most people achieve by perilous paths and an ostentatious death (*ambitiosa mors*)—without any utility to the state (*Agr.* 42.4). Tacitus here probably has the Stoic martyrs in mind when creating a contrast to Agricola's useful and selfless behaviour.[110] In general, martyrs are criticized as selfish. Helvidius Priscus is criticized (*rudem Helvidii sapientiam*, *Dial.* 5.7), though so are the senators for their guilt regarding the death and exile of the younger Helvidius (son of the famous Helvidius Priscus), Junius Mauricus, Junius Arulenus Rusticus, and Herennius Senecio, which Tacitus regards as a sign of the degradation of Domitian's reign. Piso, the head of the conspiracy against Nero, is at least an ambivalent, if not a negative character (*Ann.* 15.48; 59; 65). Senators around Nero are criticized also after his death when they behave too licentiously (*Hist.* 1.4.3). Good and bad can no longer be clearly assigned to particular people.[111] The question of how to behave in the principate has become extremely complex.[112] Many questions are unanswered; there is no satisfying closure in the remaining books.

108 Heldmann 1991, 218–230 argues for Thrasea Paetus as a real role model for a senator, such as Agricola is for a military leader. However, the three objections against Thrasea's status as a role model that he rejects (Thrasea is a self-righteous critic of the senatorial order; Thrasea concentrates too much on unimportant issues; Thrasea is led too much by personal ambitions) have to be taken seriously. Even if the positive aspects of Thrasea prevail in the end, certain possible objections are still part of this Tacitean picture of him.

109 See p.98–99.

110 Cf. Woodman 2014, 303.

111 Cf. O'Gorman 2000, 154 on "the absence of distinction between good and bad throughout Nero's reign".

112 Vielberg 1987 argues that an analysis of Tacitean norms and values helps reconstruct

4 Uncertainty and Interpretation

Our analysis has shown that the text employs strategies of disconcertion that guide, influence, and disappoint the reader in her reading process. This includes the depiction of imperial representation and its deconstruction. The 'facts' that the text provides and their interpretation or the impression they leave often do not coincide.[113] The questions posed in the work are not really answered, tensions are created, not released, and conflicts are constructed more than resolved.[114] Tacitus does not aim at an impression of 'closure'. The way in which Tacitus presents his 'facts', his interpretations, his comments, his speeches, and his rumours[115] rather cause uncertainty and doubt.[116] That these strategies are not applied regularly is itself a method of disconcertion, and part of the play with the dialectic of aperture and closure. There are certain tendencies, as we have seen, but there is no strict scheme or pattern to which of two alternatives will disconcert, or which bad figure at which point in the narrative will be given a positive twist. To show that nothing is ever certain all the time, would be to subscribe to a sort of total uncertainty that might present another, though perverted, form of certainty. In Tacitus, there is not even the certainty of uncertainty: to establish certainty first and then to confirm it sometimes

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Tacitus' idea of how the senators should behave: their actions and behaviour should bring profit to society, and retain or gain dignity and glory. Tacitus, so Vielberg 1987, 179–180, is against a merely opportunistic attitude and favours senators with an oppositional attitude. Cf. the analysis of the Tacitean Thrasea Paetus by Heldmann 1991, as already mentioned, according to whom this figure illustrates the right way to act as a senator: "nämlich das gewiß bescheidene Gewicht des Senats wo immer möglich zur Geltung zu bringen—durch eine wohlüberlegte Verbindung von Standfestigkeit in prinzipiellen Fragen der politischen Moral mit der Bereitschaft zu Zugeständnissen an die politischen Realitäten des Prinzipats" (Heldmann 1991, 229).

113 On the discrepancy between fact and impression see Walker 1952, 82 and Pelling 2009b, 161, who points out that "[g]auging 'impression' against 'fact' is here an important part of the thoughtful reader's task". On the discrepancy of facts and interpretations in the narrative see Pelling 2009b, 160.

114 For these criteria of 'closure' in a literary work see, again, Fowler 1997, 3.

115 In his analysis of rumours in Tacitus, briefly mentioned above, Gibson 1998, 123 underlines "that perceptions can be just as important as more concrete realities in determining subsequent events", but he presents the "possible objection (…) that there are many other rumours given by Tacitus where no causal role seems indicated". In my reading of Tacitus, this is not a possible objection but supports both Gibson's and my argument. The fact that sometimes rumours play a causal role in the narrative and sometimes they do not, has a disconcerting effect on the reader.

116 Similarly, Grethlein 2013, e.g. 166–167 speaks of the strong effect of the ambiguity of the Tacitean text, partly against Sailor 2008.

and break with it at others, makes the sense of doubt even greater. Orientation is harder for the reader to gain when regular patterns build up expectations only to be sometimes fulfilled and sometimes not. Patterns of interpretation are not completely destroyed, but they are always open to being tested. They have not become completely useless or turned into their opposites, but they are unstable and deficient. Tacitus presents, to use Froma Zeitlin's words in her analysis of Petronius, "integral emblems of a world-view that expresses a consistent vision of disintegration".[117] If the principal quality of Tacitus really is distrust,[118] he invites the reader too to distrust, not only history as such but also the writing of history and one's own conclusions. This is not to say that we cannot draw certain conclusions about Tacitus' concept of history, his norms and attitudes towards politics,[119] but even scholars who optimistically do so have to admit that Tacitus' perspectives for political activity are interwoven with a deeply sceptical attitude and by many dissonances.[120] Tacitus has not hidden a truth behind his story, or his true opinion behind his complex style in order for the reader to reconstruct precisely this one truth or opinion.[121] He has, rather, created a text that disconcerts the reader and forces her to come to her own conclusions and opinions.

Tacitus' characteristic style and structure support the effect of disconcertion. I would just like to point out two elements of this style that help to create ambiguity in the text: brevity, achieved for example by *asyndeta* and the absence of explicit links, and variety[122] or inconcinnity.[123] The *brevitas*

117 Zeitlin 1999, 2.

118 See Syme 1958, 398.

119 See e.g. Vielberg 1987; Heldmann 1991.

120 See, for example, Heldmann 1991, 230, who on the one hand argues that Tacitus now and again still sees opportunities for political action in the principate, but on the other hand also concedes that Tacitus' notion of history is characterized by profound scepticism and many dissonances.

121 For this position see Pelling 2009b, 164 about Tacitus' own interpretations: "We may feel uneasy with them, but Tacitus has built up sufficient authorial credit that we still pay them respect—and we respect, too, a writer who feels such emotional engagement with his story that he keeps wrestling so hard to expose a hidden truth"; and Rutledge 2009, 429 on reconstructing Tacitus' own opinion: "the recovery of his opinions is not easy, since his language and presentation are often clouded by ambiguity and doublespeak". See also Levick 2012, 278: "Tacitus struggled for truth".

122 For studying variety in Tacitus Sörbom 1935 is still helpful as a compendium. He focuses on all sorts of variations in Tacitus' style: words, numerals, adjectives/participles, tenses, constructions. Oakley 2009, 198 defines *variatio* as "the deliberate changing of grammatical or syntactical construction without there being any need to do so". Aubrion 1985, 48–49 points out that *variatio* allows for different perspectives.

123 Hellegouarc'h 1991, 2411 attributes the abandonment of *concinnitas* to the influence of the

of the style, especially the lack of conjunctions, the use of participles, the *asyndeta*, all require the reader himself to make logical connections between statements[124]—a device which is also important for the deconstruction of imperial representation through new connections of time and causality.[125] Variety and inconcinnity are effectively applied, often "placed in the context of otherwise balanced phrasing".[126] All these elements require a reader to read closely, to concentrate, and to construct meaning, i.e. to interpret for herself.[127] What Siegfried Jäkel says about the language of Plato's dialogues holds true for Tacitus' use of language too:[128] the language use has a disconcerting effect on the reader, who has to gain insight and knowledge through this very language. As well as by language and style, the reader is also led by the arrangement of the text. To the devices of disposition already mentioned we should add the breaking of the relationship between narrative and the annalistic scheme. The rubric of the year provides a system of order to an annalist, but Tacitus, though largely adhering to it (cf. *Ann.* 4.71.1), abandons a strictly annalistic structure when his narrative demands (*Ann.* 6.38.1; 12.40.5).[129]

The uncertainty and disconcertion Tacitus causes pertains to the interpretation of his whole work. Since the salient parts in which Tacitus talks about the writing of historiography have been well studied,[130] I want to draw attention

practice of *declamatio*, but this does not explain the function of *inconcinnitas* in Tacitus, which is to cause disconcertion.

124 Cf. O'Gorman 2000, 7; 9. Hellegouarc'h 1991, 2417, discussing both the brevity and the ambiguity of Tacitean style, claims that "[l]e but essentiel de la *brevitas* est en effet de réussir, par l'économie des moyens linguistiques, à faire entendre plus que ce que les mots disent". To be more precise, it is not the text that means more than its words say, it is rather the reader who is forced to understand more than the text says. For brevity as a device to reinforce the punchline see Voss 1963, 43–47.

125 See p.124–127.

126 Oakley 2009, 199. For these Tacitean qualities (brevity, variety) as anti-Ciceronian see Martin 1981, 214.

127 Cf. O'Gorman 2000, 6; 9; Oakley 2009, 197–198.

128 See Jäkel 1986, 14.

129 For Tacitus' variation of the standard annalistic pattern see Ginsburg 1981. Cf. also Pomeroy 2012, 145–146. For the combination of annalistic and regnal principles in Tacitus' structure of books in the *Annals* see Griffin 2009, 182, who observes that in the depiction of Claudius and Nero the regnal principle seems more forceful than in the depiction of the preceding emperors; book 14 and 15 start and end in the middle of the year.

130 See the introduction in Schmal 2009, 104–134. On *Ann.* 4.32–35 see Heldmann 1991, 210–211; Wisse 2013; Suerbaum 1971 on Tacitus speaking through Cremutius Cordus; Sailor 2008, 250–313 on Tacitus overlapping with Cremutius Cordus. See Griffin 2009, 168–173 on divine intervention, fate, destiny, and chance as modes of interpretation; Tacitus uses these

to passages that deal with what the historian does, as an interpreter of 'reality', in a more subtle way. I argue that certain passages depict the process of interpretation itself as something uncertain and disconcerting. In that sense, interpretation is characterized as something depending less on the 'facts' and more on people's attitudes and intentions. In the context of refuting the rumour after Drusus' death, Tacitus comes to Tiberius' and Sejanus' defence (*Ann.* 4.10–11). However, we have analysed it above as disconcerting that a clear statement of truth is given in support of Tiberius and Sejanus, and that so much effort is taken to refute an obviously false rumour. What is more, the passage also entails a clear message about the instability of interpretation over time, when the narrator claims that the death of the ruler is always a watershed moment, as it makes the public talk about him more fiercely than before (*atrociore semper fama erga dominantium exitus*, *Ann.* 4.11.2). Tacitus must be well aware that he is himself constructing this *atrocior fama*, but by saying so he partly challenges his own interpretation. Yet instability of interpretation is not only a matter of different times evoking different points of view, for example before and after the death of a ruler. Piso, Galba's preferred heir to the throne, for example, is interpreted as either (positively) austere or (negatively) harsh at the same time. This depends on whether people evaluate him justly or interpret him begrudgingly, so Tacitus (*aestimatione recta severus, deterius interpretantibus tristior habebatur*, *Hist.* 1.14.2). Similarly, interpretations of whether Germanicus' dead body showed signs of poisoning differ depending on people's attitudes. Someone who felt pity (*misericordia*) for Germanicus and was predisposed to suspicion (*praesumpta suspicione*) interpreted the 'facts' differently (*diversi interpretabantur*[131]) from someone who tended to favour his antagonist Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso (*favore in Pisonem pronior*) (*Ann.* 2.73.4). In both cases, the outcome of interpretation seems clear before people even start the hermeneutic process. Their attitudes and feelings determine how they evaluate people and events. Additionally, hermeneutic processes are depicted as deficient: Tacitus' Nero fails in his interpretation of Cornelius Sulla (*Ann.* 13.47.1); people who interpret the emperor correctly, such as Agrippina and Octavia during the murder of Britannicus (*Ann.* 13.16.1–4), have to conceal these interpretative skills.[132]

The general openness, or perhaps even dilemma, of interpretation may be best expressed in the passage directly preceding the accusation of Cremutius

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modes of interpreting events inconsistently and depending on the effect they achieve. See Griffin 2009, 174–177 on Tacitus on writing history.

131 The transmitted *interpretantur* would refer to historians.

132 Cf. Schulz 2015, 176–178.

Cordus. Tacitus here talks about possible reactions to his account of this period by descendants of people who suffered punishment or disgrace under Tiberius. Tacitus then moves on to people who are not connected to Tiberius' victims by family and discusses two alternatives of how they may interpret his text: they may think that the misdeeds of others which are recounted and which are similar to their own behaviour are in fact objections made against them (*ob similitudinem morum aliena malefacta sibi obiectari putent*); but also when the opposite, when glory and virtue are recounted, this may excite the same hostility because then they think that this positive picture indicts their own opposite qualities by too sharp a contrast (*etiam gloria ac virtus infensos habet, ut nimis et propinquo diversa arguens*) (*Ann.* 4.33.4). The historian finds himself in the same dilemma of interpretation as his readers and the figures in his narrative.[133]

That even interpretation has become a disconcerting method in itself, has an effect on the reader. He is forced to see a text, a world, and a history that is sometimes explicable and sometimes not. On the one hand, he receives implicit instructions, but on the other hand he sees how they fail to work. Disconcerting literature disturbs.[134] And Tacitus' texts do not offer the possibility of removing or reducing the disconcertion with comic effects and laughter, as other forms of literature do.[135] Tacitus' disconcerted reader has to develop critical thinking and reach his own commentaries, answers, and reactions.[136] Disconcertion thus ideally improves the ability to learn, and may be understood as a creative challenge.[137]

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133 Cf. p.149–154. I am following studies that have pointed out the parallels between the historian, the reader, and the figures of the narrative as interpreters of history, historiography, and the actions described in the narrative, such as O'Gorman 2000; Haynes 2003; Grethlein 2013. See O'Gorman 2000, 78–105 on Tiberius as a text to be read, and Haynes 2003, 3: "My thesis is that Tacitus unifies the style and content of his historiography in order to produce in the reader the experience of believing and understanding as the actors in the text do." See Grethlein 2013, 140 on Tacitus mimicking the perspective of his historical agents and exposing the readers to the same uncertainty as the characters, which Grethlein refers to as a "mimetic device"; see Grethlein 2013, 154–156 on similarities between Tacitus and Tiberius.

134 See Jäkel 1986, 9.

135 See Jäkel 1986, 15 on Menander.

136 Cf. Jäkel 1986, 12 on the recipient of ancient theatre and Simonis 2011, 204.

137 See Simonis 2011, 196 drawing on Luhmann's systems theory, in which the ability to become disconcerted is characteristic of a system.

Conclusion to Part 2

Tacitus offers an excellent starting point for the study of historiographical strategies used against Nero and Domitian and of the deconstruction of forms of their imperial representation, by which I mean those topics through which the emperor, his entourage, or others construct an image of him, such as military actions, building programmes, and divinity. Tacitus takes up all the historical and panegyrical topics of imperial representation and deconstructs them, i.e. re-shapes them to negative effect, in different ways, adapting his strategies to the existing discourses about each emperor (chapter 3). In Nero's case, the emperor as military leader is deconstructed as an inactive *princeps* absent from war and as not fulfilling his role; in Domitian's case, the emperor is deconstructed as a hypocrite faking military triumphs and only pretending to fulfil his role. They are both contrasted to characters who take ideal military actions, namely Corbulo, the loyal and active commander, and Agricola, the modest and successful commander (chapter 3.1). Building endeavours, which are material media of representation, are more often striking for their omission from the historiographical texts than performative forms of representation such as triumphs and banquets. But Nero's activities as builder of Rome are deconstructed as acts of transgression and destruction (chapter 3.2). Likewise, his organization of public entertainment is described as overstepping moral and social boundaries. With Nero the performer these boundaries, as well as the distinction between reality and the stage, are depicted as blurred (chapter 3.3). His performance as orator is used to unmask his good relationship with the senate at the beginning of his reign as merely constructed by Seneca's rhetoric, and to depict the unfavourable development of Nero's independence from his teacher (chapter 3.4). While panegyrical discourse pictures Nero and Domitian as gods during their lifetime, Tacitus and the critical discourse follow the historical decision not to make these emperors divine. By contrast to earlier panegyric, in historiographical texts people, animals, nature, and the gods do not acknowledge or support their divinity. They are rather depicted as either indifferent or even hostile to the emperors (chapter 3.5). All this produces a certain atmosphere associated with the imperial reign. Whereas panegyric makes the reign a Golden Age in Nero's case and an epoch unequalled by any past time in Domitian's case, Tacitus' texts create the atmosphere of an ever worsening dynamic of bad times under these two emperors (chapter 3.6).

The deconstruction of these topics of imperial representation is achieved by three main literary strategies (chapter 4). These are negative connotations, unfavourable analyses of reasons for imperial representation, and construc-

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tions of new forms of temporal and social logic (chapter 4.1). First, the presentation of 'facts' is most often accompanied by connotations, both directly as comments (at a telling position in the text) and indirectly. These connotations mark out a form of imperial representation as lacking *moderatio* and as a hubristic transgression. They often turn around and re-interpret an earlier panegyrical transgression that was evaluated positively. More specifically, they can characterize the emperor's behaviour and his public image as unmanly and un-Roman, often combining the two concepts, and with a different focus for Nero than for Domitian (chapter 4.2). The second strategy of deconstructing imperial representation is based on the emperor's reasons for his behaviour and acts, and takes several forms. The emperor's behaviour can be deconstructed by negative depictions of his processes of reasoning, or by giving, suggesting, or leaving out certain reasons for his conduct. The depiction of the relationship between motive and action becomes persuasive through coherent character portraits, again both explicit and implicit. The Tacitean concept of *simulatio* and the narrative device of focalization play an important role in persuasive character depiction, especially for Domitian and Tiberius (chapter 4.3). A third literary means of deconstructing imperial representation is to show that it is based on new kinds of temporal and social logic or on illogicality. Not only do Tacitus' emperors defy the logic of time. The narrator also manipulates chronology for his purposes. His emperors are also portrayed as negating social logic: they either neglect the relationship of deed and reward, or they pervert social norms themselves (chapter 4.4).

These strategies of deconstructing imperial representation are, however, accompanied by a Tacitean mode of interpretative uncertainty (chapter 5). This mode can be described with the help of modern theories of inconsistency, (false) closure, and disconcertion (chapter 5.1). The fact that Tacitus gives alternative, inconsistent versions or explanations of events, and the way he does so, is disconcerting: the text seems to establish patterns and guidelines for how to evaluate alternatives only to destabilize and disrupt them again. This concerns cases in which the narrator expresses an explicit preference for one of the alternatives mentioned, suggests an implicit preference, or refrains from giving any preference at all. The uncertainty arising from different variants and from the narrator's presentation of them prevents closure (chapter 5.2). Uncertainty also arises from the Tacitean use of binary oppositions (e.g. man/woman, good/bad), which in other cases usually provide orientation. The Tacitean text demonstrates how binary oppositions become dysfunctional both in the narrative, through the emperors depicted, and within the interpretation of the narrator himself. Distinctions such as 'good' and 'bad' are not clear and are often blurred, with a disconcerting effect (chapter 5.3). The effect of uncer-

tainty inherent to the text, the unstable patterns of interpretation, and the lack of closure affect the reading process and the reader of Tacitean texts too. This becomes especially evident in passages in which Tacitus describes hermeneutic processes (chapter 5.4).

PART 3

Cassius Dio: Deconstruction and Typologies

Introduction to Part 3

The purpose of this third part of the book is to analyse the strategies and functions of the deconstruction of Nero's and Domitian's imperial representation in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*. To do so, we will study both the literary techniques of this work and the socio-political discourses of the early third century in which it participates. I will argue that Dio's mode of deconstruction, his way of reshaping formerly positive or neutral constructions of emperors, produces typologies of bad emperors—from the beginning of the principate to Dio's own days—which offer an alternative to the genealogical constructions of Dio's contemporary emperors. This Dionian deconstruction is not accompanied by the uncertainty and disconcertion that is typical of Tacitus.

By analysing Dio's strategies of deconstruction, part Three of this book presents the first systematic analysis of literary techniques in the *Roman History*.[1] With its focus on Julio-Claudian and Flavian times it discusses one of the least studied sections of the work's 80 books.[2] Dio's account of Nero's and Domitian's reigns have both survived only in the form of Byzantine epitomes and fragments; the extant text on Nero is more than three times longer than the one on Domitian and hence provides more examples for this study.[3] Compared to Tacitus, Dio's literary accounts are nonetheless more complete: we still have the depiction of Domitian's reign (which is lost in the *Histories*) and of Nero's reign after Thrasea's death (where the *Annals* break off).

Chapter 6 situates the *Roman History* in contemporary literary and socio-political discourses, which are crucial to understanding Dio's mode of deconstruction, and presents an overview of imperial representation, i.e. the creation of an imperial image by the emperor, his entourage (e.g. advisers), or others, and its transgressive forms in the work. It also makes use of current approaches in scholarship on Dio, which has not only increased enormously in the last

1 Cf. the overview of scholarship on Cassius Dio in e.g. Martinelli 1999; Kuhn-Chen 2002, 34–37. Cassius Dio has been consulted most often by historians in order to gain information about a specific detail or question concerning a certain event, and only rarely by philologists interested in him as a writer.

2 The Augustan and contemporary books have received most attention. Kemezis 2014, who offers the most recent interpretation of Dio's whole *Roman History* in its Severan context, focuses on the late Republican and Augustan books (see e.g. Kemezis 2014, 91; 103).

3 I have used the edition of Boissevain (1895–1901) and the Loeb translation of Cary 1925, often in an adapted version, for paraphrases, as well as current Loeb translations of other authors. For the book numbering of Dio see p.176.

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decade, but has also altered some of its old premises.[4] Chapter 7 analyses the strategies by which Cassius Dio deconstructs imperial representation. It presents all the sub-strategies, methods, and concepts that comprise the toolkit of deconstruction. Dio makes use of these strategies more often than Tacitus. The focus will be on Nero and Domitian. However, to bring out the typologies of bad emperors, we will also look at passages in which Dio deals with imperial representation from a theoretical viewpoint (such as the constitutional debate in book 52), and we will give examples of the deconstruction of the imperial representation of Dio's contemporary emperors such as Commodus, Septimius Severus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus and of earlier emperors such as Tiberius and Caligula. This is important from a methodological point of view: the accounts of Tiberius and Caligula survive in their original form and so provide a suitable point of comparison for the results gained from epitomized text passages. Part Three will thus bring out the specifically Dionian mode of deconstruction, but will also refer to the results of the analysis of Tacitean deconstruction (as presented in chapter 4): it will study the negative connotations of imperial representation, the creation of persuasive characters, the rhetoric of combination (e.g. of action and motivation or of several actions), the mechanisms of selecting and focusing on certain forms of imperial representation, and how the atmosphere of a reign, depicted as positive in the panegyrical discourse, is undermined in the text. Chapter 8 makes explicit the typologies produced by deconstruction. Drawing on modern theories of collective memory I will argue that Nero and Domitian were 'hot memory' in the early third century: Dio's deconstruction and creation of typologies oppose the imperial genealogies constructed by Severan emperors, whose depiction in Cassius Dio will be studied in this third part too.

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4 See in particular the volumes of Lange/Madsen 2016; Fromentin et al. 2016; Burden-Strevens/Lindholmer 2019.

CHAPTER 6

Writing Historiography under the Severans

1 The *Roman History* and the Early Third Century

1.1 *Author, Text, and Language*

As well as Tacitus' negative verdict on Nero and Domitian, we also find positive and ambivalent evaluations of these two emperors in the second and third century, even among the elite.[1] Pausanias contends that Nero had a noble soul (ψυχῆς δὲ γενναίας) that was ruined by a perverted education.[2] Philostratus evaluates Nero's project of the Corinth canal and his proclamation of the freedom of Achaea as (somewhat) positive.[3] Domitian is portrayed as simply a dull figure in Jewish-Christian texts such as the Fifth *Sibylline Oracle* and the *Gospel of Luke*, and even as a good emperor in the Twelfth *Sibylline Oracle* (12*Sib* 124–142).[4] The negotiations over the image of Nero and Domitian were still ongoing in the two centuries after Tacitus and Suetonius. One of the most important texts that participates in these discourses is Cassius Dio's *Roman History*. If we wish to interpret the specificity of the depiction of Nero and Domitian and their imperial representation in this work, we need to be informed about its background: its Severan author, its textual transmission, and its linguistic and cultural context.

Cassius Dio was from Bithynia. He was born, the son of a Roman senator, at the beginning of the reign of Marcus Aurelius around 164 CE and may have been a relative of Dio of Prusa.[5] Dio most probably received rhetorical training for his career as a senator.[6] By 180 CE he was in the city of Rome. After around

1 For positive discourses on Nero and Domitian see also p.45–46.
2 See Paus. 7.17.3 with Alcock 1994, 107.
3 Cf. Champlin 2003, 27 on Philostr. *VA* 5.7 and 5.41. On Nero in the third century cf. Gowing 1997, 2559.
4 The *Twelfth Sibylline Oracle* is difficult to date; the death of Severus Alexander is the *terminus post quem*. Cf. Sidebottom 2007, 66–67; Backhaus 2014, 392.
5 For introductions to Cassius Dio's life and work see e.g. Schwartz 1899/1957, 394–406; Millar 1964, 5–27; Barnes 1984, 242–245; Wirth 1985, 7–60; Rich 1990, 1–12; Hose 1994, 356–363; Schmidt 1997, 2592–2598; 2634–2638; Scott 2015, 170–174. See also the overview in Swan 2004, 1–3.
6 For the rhetoric of the time see Swain 1996, 91; Heath 2004, 3–89. Important rhetorical developments include the *progymnasmata*, the development of status theory by Hermogenes in the second half of the second century, and the declamations. On the influence of rhetorical education on Dio see Lintott 1997, 2501. For speeches in Cassius Dio see Millar 1961, 14–15. For

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10 years he became a member of the senate as *quaestor* under Commodus, probably in 189 CE. In 193 CE he was designated *praetor* under the emperor Pertinax and held the office probably in 194 CE. In the civil war between Septimius Severus and Clodius Albinus, whom he favoured, he first adopted a neutral attitude, but later he praised Septimius Severus in two short works.[7] We know that Dio was a member of Septimius Severus' *consilium* in 204 CE and *consul* (*suffectus*) for the first time probably in 205 or 206 CE under the same emperor. In 214/215 CE he was in Nicomedia with Caracalla, but he went back to Rome during the reign of Macrinus and at the beginning of Elagabalus' principate in 217–218 CE. Afterwards and still during the reign of Elagabalus he was governor in Pergamon and Smyrna, and in Bithynia (possibly in 221–222 CE), and under Severus Alexander *proconsul* of Africa (perhaps in 223/224 CE) and imperial legate in Dalmatia and Upper Pannonia (probably in 224 and 228 CE), where his rigorous discipline over the troops stirred the rage of the Praetorian Guard. Consequently, he held his second consulship outside Rome, in 229 CE, together with Severus Alexander. He retired at the age of around 65 and returned to his home in Nicaea after he had spent roughly 22 years altogether in the city of Rome.[8]

As we can see from this short summary, Dio's life as active Roman politician fell under the end of Antonine rule and the Severan dynasty.[9] With that new regime the political circumstances changed, as dynastic rule was re-introduced. Cassius Dio has long been read as an exceptional politician who criticizes the Severan dynasty—which is assumed to have downgraded and neglected the senators in favour of the knights, the army, and the freedmen—from an insider's point of view and as the mouthpiece of the senate.[10] But recent schol-

speeches in books 51–56 cf. Swan 2004, 26–28. For the rhetorical background of speeches in Cassius Dio see Burden-Strevens 2016; Fomin 2016; Bellissime 2016.

7 Dio integrated these two works, which probably date from 197/198 CE, into the *Roman History*. He explains how he compiled his work in an important passage preceding the narrative of the death of Commodus (73[72].23.1–5): first, he had written a piece about dreams and omens for Septimius Severus' reign, which was warmly welcomed by the first Severan emperor; second, he was the author of a work on the civil war following Commodus' death, which later also found its way into the *Roman History*. Dio did not change these two earlier works much when he integrated them into the *Roman History* (cf. Schmidt 1999, 95). For more detail see Schmidt 1997, 2598–2625. Cf. Bleicken 1962, 465; Barnes 1984, 245–246; Swan 2004, 29.

8 Cf. Gowing 2016, 117.

9 Introductions to the Severan period and its culture are provided by e.g. Grant 1996; Swain/Harrison/Elsner 2007; Handy 2009 (on the Severans and the army); Faust/Leitmeir 2011 (from an archaeological perspective); Schöpe 2014 (on the imperial court).

10 Cf. Bleicken 1962, 455; 458; de Blois 1984, 373–377.

arship has modified this assertion in three ways. First, we have to be careful not to underestimate the historical role of the Severan senate.[11] The senate was still the institution that gave authority to the emperor.[12] Second, this senate was not a unified group that spoke with one voice.[13] It is therefore not unproblematic to speak of Cassius Dio as a 'typical senator' or to consider him the spokesperson of the senate.[14] The latter would also be difficult since, third, Dio's career was less exceptional than scholarship has thought for several decades. He was indeed *consul suffectus*, a member of Septimius Severus' *consilium*, in Nicomedia together with Caracalla, and consul with Severus Alexander. But this career is not enough to support the high political position that has been claimed for him. Cassius Dio was in fact not as intimate with Septimius Severus as has long been assumed.[15] He was not close to Caracalla either.[16]

All these emperors are dealt with in Cassius Dio's main work, his 80 books of *Roman History*, which reach from Rome's foundation to the reign of Severus Alexander.[17] The *Roman History* is written from the point of view of a senator

11 Cf. Davenport 2012, 798; 803–808; 815.

12 Cf. de Blois 1999, 269; Gleason 2011, 67 for the relationship of senators and emperors. Madsen 2016, 149–154 examines Dio's depiction of the relationship between the senate and the emperors from Vespasian to Septimius Severus.

13 On the division among the senators cf. Davenport 2012, 811–815. On Dio's tendency to even out senatorial divisions cf. Kemezis 2014, 22–23 ("Dio exaggerates the extent to which all senators would agree with his arguments"). Kemezis 2012 analyses a division within the senatorial elite, which does not feature in Cassius Dio, see esp. Kemezis 2012, 387–388; 410–414. He detects this division from the difference between the aristocratic ethos in Cassius Dio and the aristocratic ethos expressed in the *Historia Augusta*, which Kemezis reads as an expression of the senator Marius Maximus (see Kemezis 2012, 409).

14 Davenport 2012, 797; 799; 803; 811 convincingly advises against viewing Dio as the mouthpiece of all senators. On Dio's distanced attitude towards senators, esp. *homines novi*, who had a better relationship with the *princeps* than he himself cf. Davenport 2012, 798; 808–811; 814. Even Scott, arguing (in reaction to Davenport 2012) that Dio "provides a generally accurate account that reflects senatorial experience" under Caracalla (Scott 2015, 175), allows for differing senatorial opinions and characterizes Dio's version of a senator's life under Caracalla as "*likely* typical of *most* senators" (Scott 2015, 159), "hardly atypical" (Scott 2015, 161), applying "to *most*, if not all, senators at the time" (Scott 2015, 162), "*most likely* reflective of the *overall* senatorial experience of Caracalla" (Scott 2015, 167) (all italics mine).

15 See Moscovich 2004, 358.

16 See Davenport 2012, 799–803 for Dio's relationship with Septimius Severus and Caracalla. Cf. Kemezis 2014, 142 on Dio's anecdotes about himself and contemporary emperors: "Dio does not emerge from these anecdotes as a privileged political insider, nor does he mean readers to see him as such."

17 It must be doubted whether the two other works on Trajan and Arrian that the *Suda* ascribes to Cassius Dio are really his. Cf. Sidebottom 2007, 56; 59–60.

who considers the principate to be the best form of government possible for Rome.[18] An important passage for understanding Dio's ideal form of monarchical rule is the famous constitutional debate in book 52, in which his Agrippa argues for democracy and his Maecenas for monarchy:[19] what the figure of Maecenas says about (ideal) monarchy and imperial representation can be used as a point of reference for statements about Dio's emperors in general. Here and throughout the whole work, Dio judges emperors from the perspective of a senator who is proud of the senatorial order and who cares about the honours attributed to himself and to the senate.[20] In Dio's view, a good emperor treats not only the senators well, but also the people.[21] Dio's attitude towards the soldiers, however, is negative. This is mirrored in what he considers the emperor's ideal form of behaviour towards them: the emperor should be severe, and tough in discipline.[22] Dio's ideal emperor is Marcus Aurelius, who receives a long eulogy after his death (72[71].34.2–36.4).[23] Pertinax' short

18 Cf. Flach 1973, 133; Manuwald 1979, 26; Ameling 1997, 2479–2482. Simons 2009, 10–12 summarizes the development of scholarship on Dio's view of monarchy. For Dio's attitude towards several forms of rule cf. Aalders 1986, 296–302. On Dio's view of the Republic cf. Fechner 1986, 129–135. Cassius Dio is clear in his repudiation of democracy (44.2.2).

19 Analyses of the speeches of Agrippa and Maecenas in book 52 are provided by Bleicken 1962, 446–464; Millar 1964, 102–118; Reinhold 1986, 219–221; Fechner 1986, 71–86; Rich 1989, 99–100; Flach ^{3}1998, 262–266; Escribano 1999, 175–184; Schmidt 1999, 104–117; Hose 1994, 390–399; Hose 2007, 466. Only Bering-Staschweski 1981, 129–134 does not see a paraenetic function in the speech of Maecenas (but cf. Manuwald 1984, 679).

20 For Dio's senatorial ethos cf. Flach 1973, 141–142; Gowing 1992, 19–32 (on Dio's attitude towards senate and emperor, his religious, philosophical, and ethical attitude, and his thoughts about the treatment of soldiers). Kemezis 2012, 388 reconstructs Dio's senatorial ethos by looking at the representation of the senatorial elite in the generation preceding Dio: "That ethos (…) is based heavily on senators' competent performance of their official duties, and the dignity that they derive from the exercise of power. It stresses actions independent of the emperor, but is not an anti-monarchical construct"; cf. Kemezis 2012, 401–402; 406–407. On Dio in relation to contemporary senators cf. Gowing 1998, 381–383.

21 Cf. de Blois 1999, 272–275.

22 For Dio's attitude towards the soldiers cf. de Blois 1984, 366–367; de Blois 1997, 2660–2675; de Blois 1999, 275–281.

23 For Marcus Aurelius as Dio's ideal emperor cf. de Blois 1984, 365–366; Wirth 1985, 32; Gowing 1992, 26–27 (on Marcus Aurelius and Pertinax); Kuhn-Chen 2002, 243; Kemezis 2012, 387. In general, positive traits of an emperor are: tireless commitment on behalf of the public, even if this is to his own disadvantage; incorruptibility; adherence to the judicial and social norms; defending the home country against revolutions; military virtue; putting the commonwealth before personal interests; renouncing personal enrichment; outspokenness and loyalty; humane-ness; clemency; rationality; justice; honourable and mild treatment of opponents; refraining from violence (see Fechner 1986, 249). For Dio's ideal ruler as *princeps inter pares* (or rather δημοτικός) cf. Flach 1973, 140 and 57.8.3 as well

reign is praised too.[24] The first *princeps* Augustus is, all in all, positively evaluated too.[25] Most emperors, however, are ambivalent figures, neither completely good nor exclusively bad. Among the worst emperors in Dio are—besides Nero and Domitian—Caligula, Commodus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus.

The text of the *Roman History* presents two different challenges: the first concerns the dating and the method of composition, the second concerns the complex transmission of the text and its constitution today. Cassius Dio claims that he spent ten years collecting his material from the beginning of Rome to the death of Septimius Severus, and that it took him twelve years to compose his work (συνέλεξα δὲ πάντα τὰ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις μέχρι τῆς Σεουήρου μεταλλαγῆς πραχθέντα ἐν ἔτεσι δέκα, καὶ συνέγραψα ἐν ἄλλοις δώδεκα, 73[72].23.5).[26] The dates of these two periods—of research and of composition—are debated.[27] There are two different approaches to dating the *Roman History*, which lead either to an early or to a late dating.[28] Following the early dating, Dio composed the *Roman History* mainly during the reigns of Caracalla, Macrinus, and Elagabalus. According to the late dating, Dio wrote his work under Severus Alexander. It is important for the argumentation presented in this part Three to stress that even an early dating allows for allusions and references to con-

as 57.9.1 (about civil behaviour by Tiberius). Traits of a bad emperor are, according to Gowing 1992, 28: "inappropriate behaviour if not downright depravity, failure to listen to the advice of others, lack of education, inability to carry out the imperial duties, contempt for and excessive financial demands made on the Senate".

24 For Dio on Pertinax cf. Kemezis 2012, 397–402. See especially Pertinax' obituary, positioned before the depiction of the start of Septimius Severus' reign (75[74].5.6).

25 Dio's attitude towards Octavian/Augustus has been interpreted in different ways. Interpretations differ depending on whether one considers Dio as a moralist or a utilitarian. A clear break between the portrayal of Octavian and the depiction of Augustus, or tensions and contradictions in the description of Augustus, are seen by Manuwald 1979, 273–284; Wirth 1985, 30; Escribano 1999, 184–189; Kemezis 2014, 121–122 (who focuses on the break between Dio's narrative of Octavian, which belongs to the 'Republican Narrative', and Dio's narrative of Augustus, which is part of the 'Imperial Narrative'). Rich 1990, 16 reads Dio's Augustus as a positive model emperor (cf. Rich 1989, 89; 94; 96–97; 101–102 for the contradictions in Dio's portrayal of Augustus according to Manuwald 1979); cf. Swan 2004, 13–17.

26 We can assume that during his period of research Dio took notes, on which he was able to draw when writing up the narrative, cf. Rich 1989, 90–91.

27 See the overview on dating the *Roman History* in Kemezis 2014, 282–293.

28 Early datings (between 194 and 223 CE) are favoured e.g. by Schwartz 1899/1957; Millar 1964; Sordi 2000; late datings (between 211 and 234 CE) are proposed e.g. by Letta 1979; Barnes 1984; Kemezis 2014. Kemezis holds that the *Roman History* was finished between 228 and 231 CE, but published only after Dio's death. The publication especially of the contemporary books, which contain many points of criticism, under a Severan emperor seems unlikely, cf. Kemezis 2014, 146.

temporary (Severan and Antonine) emperors in the early imperial books.[29] Not only may Dio have revised his text at a later point in time, but even according to the early dating Dio will have composed the early imperial books during the reign of Elagabalus.[30]

The 80 books of *Roman History* have not all come down to us directly.[31] We have Dio's original text only for books 36 to 60 and for parts of books 79(78) and 80(79). For the rest of the work we must rely on fragments and epitomes, of which the most important are excerpts made under Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in the tenth century, and *Epitomai* written by Xiphilinus and Zonaras in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[32] The two variant numberings for books 61 to 80 result from this state of transmission.[33] For the imperial period, including the reigns of Nero and Domitian, Xiphilinus' epitome is our most important text.[34] He preserves roughly one quarter of Dio's original text on the princip-

29 As there are allusions and direct references to Dio's own time also in the earlier books—for the regal period see Schulz 2019a—they have to be explained in two different ways. Scholars who follow an early dating consider them to be later revisions by Dio. If one subscribes to a later dating, allusions to Dio's own times can be explained more easily: Dio then inserted them directly into his work while composing it, mainly during the reign of Severus Alexander (cf. Barnes 1984, 252–253).

30 This point of view corresponds to Swan's dating of the work: Swan 2004, 2–3; 28–36 prefers an early dating, with Dio's research starting around 200 CE under Septimius Severus, and composition from around 210 CE onwards and mainly undertaken under Caracalla, Macrinus, and Elagabalus. If Dio wrote at a consistent pace, he would have composed six or seven books a year. Around 222 CE there may have been a first publication of books 1 to 76, but this edition (if it existed) has not come down to us. Dio may have prepared a second edition around 230 CE with a slightly revised version of books 1 to 76 and the addition of books 77–80. Starting from these assumptions Swan himself calculates that Dio wrote his Augustan books under Macrinus, his books on Caracalla and Elagabalus under Severus Alexander. We can add that, according to Swan's dating, Dio would have composed his books on Tiberius, the other Julio-Claudians, and the Flavians under Elagabalus.

31 For the state of the transmitted text cf. Millar 1964, 1–4; Potter 1999, 74–76; Murison 1999, 1–5.

32 For Zonaras cf. Boissevain 1891 in his *Praefatio* ix–x, who argues for his dependence on Xiphilinus, and not directly on Dio in the later imperial books (from Zonaras 11.21 on). For the *excerpta Constantiniana* and Zonaras cf. Swan 2004, 36–38; Simons 2009, 25–32.

33 I will give both the book numbers of Boissevain and of Leunclavius (in brackets) whenever they differ from each other. Boissevain himself gives Leunclavius' differing book numbers at the top of the right-hand page in his edition. In the Loeb edition Cary follows Boissevain's numbering. He indicates the beginning of Leunclavius' books in the left margin. For different book numberings of 61–80 (Leunclavius vs. Gutschmid/Boissevain) cf. Swan 2004, 383–385. On difficulties regarding book 70 cf. Schmidt 1989.

34 For Xiphilinus' technique of epitomization see Mallan 2013b (who contextualizes Xiphilinus in the middle Byzantine period); Berbessou-Broustet 2016. Cf. also Brunt 1980, 488–492; Schmidt 1989, 55–59; Edmondson 1992, 29; Murison 1999, 1–2.

ate and rarely adds material from his other sources, which include Eusebius, Polybius, and Plutarch. Xiphilinus' method is not to paraphrase or summarize all of Dio's text. Rather, he inconsistently omits some sections completely, compresses and abbreviates others, but also gives some passages—even longer ones—almost *verbatim*, thus producing excerpts, often selected according to his own interests. In general, he is a relatively reliable epitomator:[35] he makes fewer mistakes than Zonaras and serious mistakes are very rare; he usually sticks to Dio's order and mostly preserves Dio's own words too. But when we interpret Dio via Xiphilinus, it is important not to draw arguments from the lack of any piece of information or from the lack of unity in a passage, from the length of a passage, or from the exact wording.[36]

The text of the *Roman History* has raised further questions that do not depend on its problematic transmission. The most obvious one concerns the language: why did Dio write the *Roman History* in Greek? His choice of Greek for a historiographical work distinguishes him, for example, from his contemporary Marius Maximus, who wrote twelve biographies in Latin from Nerva to Elagabalus, which have survived only indirectly through the *Historia Augusta*.[37] But now that Dio's relationship with the Second Sophistic has become the focus of scholarship,[38] the question might be reversed: why would Dio have written in Latin? Cassius Dio's mother tongue was Greek, and Greek dominated the literature of his time.[39] Under the first non-Italian dynasty and surrounded by a growing number of Greek-speaking senators Dio wrote in the language that was also used by his favourite emperor Marcus Aurelius.[40] Dio's language choice is

35 Cf. Murison 1999, 267 for Xiphilinus' reliability, with the example of 67.15.6. Cf. however Ehrhardt 1994 for an example of Xiphilinus changing and Christianizing Dio's text. For Xiphilinus' deviation from Dio's original cf. also Brunt 1973, 174.

36 For the methodological treatment of the epitomized text cf. Gowing 1997, 2560–2563; Pelling 1997, 124 (who is extremely cautious, also regarding the disposition of the narrative: "We cannot exclude the possibility that there has been some more far-reaching displacement of material to suit Xiphilinus' strategy, though this is admittedly unlikely"); Murison 1999, 5.

37 Unfortunately we cannot know for certain whether Cassius Dio and Marius Maximus read each other's work, cf. Kemezis 2012, 411 n. 59. Meckler assumes that Dio read Marius Maximus (cf. Meckler 2005, 231); Molinier Arbo argues that they influenced each other (cf. Molinier Arbo 2009, 290–291 on the publication of Dio after the publication of Marius Maximus, and on Marius Maximus reacting to Dio's earlier work).

38 See Jones 2016, 298–302 for Dio's sophistic qualities: he is keen to display his readings in Plato and Homer and his *paideia* in rhetoric.

39 Cf. Whitmarsh 2007, 30: "The exception of the jurists, however, proves the general rule: Greek remained, as under the Antonines, the expected language for literary writing." We should add the Christian authors and Marius Maximus among the exceptions too.

40 According to Gowing 1992, 292 (esp. n. 7) a quarter of the senators of Dio's time came

an expression of his double identity: he sees himself politically as Roman, but culturally mainly as Greek.[41] And the crucial element of this cultural identity is language: by using Attic Greek an author presents himself as member of the elite,[42] and Cassius Dio himself reports that he read many books to train himself in a pure Attic style (ἐπὶ τῷ ἀττικίζειν, 55.12.5).

How closely Cassius Dio worked together and exchanged ideas with other authors of the Second Sophistic is not certain.[43] Research on the so-called Julia Domna Circle can hardly go beyond speculation. The wife of Septimius Severus brought various authors of the Second Sophistic together, but we do not know any details except that Philostratus and Philiscus participated in this circle, which was most probably not an institution in any strict sense.[44] Whether Dio was somehow connected to this group or even a member of it is also unclear.[45] But Dio's text can still be considered and interpreted as a product of contemporary discourses: Tim Whitmarsh characterizes the literature of the Severan period as a literature of compilation and collection.[46] An important feature of prose literature was "large-scale, synthetic works that attempt to capture and define intellectual traditions", such as Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists* or Diogenes' *Lives of the Famous Philosophers*.[47] We will see that Dio's work fits within these Severan literary discourses that construct tradi-

from the Greek East. See also Steinmetz 1982, 38–39 (while under Hadrian 15% of the senators came from the Eastern provinces, they were already 27% under Commodus). Potter 2014, 69 speaks of almost 50% of senate members with non-Italian roots under Hadrian.

41 Cf. Reinhold 1986, 220; Gowing 1998, 389; Sidebottom 2007, 76–77 (with references to Bowie 1970 and Swain 1996, and against Bowersock 1969, who argues that the Greek elite was Romanized and merged with the Hellenized Roman elite). Also Swain 1996, 401–408 considers Dio as Roman from a political point of view and as Greek with regard to his cultural identity. See also Burden-Strevens 2015, 289–290; 296–297; 304 (arguing against too strong a dichotomy of the political and the cultural as two distinct spheres of identification). For the political assimilation of the Greek elite in the second century, who still kept their Greek cultural identity, cf. de Blois 1984, 359–361. By contrast, Dio's Romanization is emphasized too much by Aalders 1986, 283–290; 295; 302–304, who considers Dio an exception in his time.

42 For the social impact of Attic Greek cf. Swain 1996, 17–42; 407–408; 409–410.

43 Cf. Whitmarsh 2007, 50 on our general uncertainty about the interaction between the authors of the time. Moscovich 2004 assumes an exchange between Dio and the sophists, especially those surrounding Julia Domna.

44 Cf. Bowersock 1969, 108; Whitmarsh 2007, 32–34.

45 We know of the Julia Domna Circle only thanks to Philostratus and Dio, but there is no proof that Dio was a member, cf. Gowing 1992, 290.

46 Cf. Whitmarsh 2007, 44.

47 Whitmarsh 2007, 50.

tions, although on a political rather than an intellectual level.[48] In addition, we can at least assume an exchange between Cassius Dio and Philostratus.[49] As Alain Gowing has shown, the two authors share an interest in Cicero, which is not typical of Greek authors of the time, and a political interest in the question of how to deal with tyranny.[50] What is more, Philostratus shares Dio's interest in Nero and Domitian, as expressed in his *Nero* and in his *Vita Apollonii*.[51]

1.2 *The Historian and Contemporary History*

As a historian Cassius Dio has earned quite diverse estimations. His literary achievements and his style have often been criticized. After the influential verdict of Eduard Schwartz, he was long considered a second-class historiographer at best, although he was also regarded as an important historical source.[52] By contrast, recent studies have valued his consistent presentation of the whole of Roman history, for which he must have gathered a massive amount of material.[53] Dio's stylistic ideal is Thucydides.[54] He read contemporary authors and Greek authors, first of all Homer, also Euripides, the tragedians, and Plutarch. And he also consulted Latin authors such as Sallust, Cicero, Livy, Virgil, and probably Seneca.[55] The question of Dio's sources has taken a turn from *Quellen-*

48 Cf. Whitmarsh 2007, 38–40 on constructions of (mainly intellectual) genealogies, stemmata, and lines of tradition in Philostratus and Diogenes Laertios.

49 Cf. Jones 2016, 305. Millar 1964, 19–20 assumes that Dio and Philostratus had a close connection. Moscovich 2004, 360–361 considers it highly probably that Dio knew Philostratus' *VA*.

50 See Gowing 1998, 376; 386–387. Gowing analyses the dialogue between Cicero and Philiscus in Cassius Dio and speculates that Dio originally wrote this dialogue independently of the *Roman History* (cf. Gowing 1998, 377–378; 384).

51 For Domitian in Philostr. *VA* see esp. 7.1, 7.11–12, 7.32–35, 8.7–8, 8.25. The remarkable ending of Dio's depiction of Domitian's life, which shows the reaction of Apollonius of Tyana to Domitian's death (67.17.1; 67.18.1–2), is not found in Suetonius and may well be influenced by Philostratus.

52 Cf. Schwartz 1899/1957, 402; 406; Bleicken 1962, 444.

53 Cf. Kemezis 2014, 92–94. Reinhold 1986, 213 summarizes the reproaches directed against Cassius Dio, and defends him emphatically (see also Reinhold 1986, 222).

54 Cf. e.g. Flach 1973, 130–131; Aalders 1986, 291–292; Lintott 1997, 2499–2500; Swan 1997, 2525; Escribano 1999, 172; Zecchini 2016, 118–119. For other models cf. Lachenaud 2003, 104, who compares Dio's treatment of his models to that of Jorge Luis Borges.

55 For Dio's knowledge of these authors cf. Aalders 1986, 291–293. Dio's knowledge of Virgil is implied by 76(75).10.2, where a verse from the *Aeneid* is cited. For the widespread knowledge of Virgil around 200 CE cf. Swain 2007, 10. For Dio reading Cicero (*Second Philippic*, *De divinatione*) cf. Lintott 1997, 2519; Mallan 2016, 275. Gowing 1998, 384; 388 analyses references to Cicero in the dialogue between Cicero and Philiscus, who is said to have read

forschung in the strict sense towards research that analyses both Dio's originality in presenting his material and the literary qualities of his text.[56] The fact that Dio made use of material and interpretations that he found in his sources for his own work does not imply that we cannot consider this material and these interpretations also as his own choice and as part and parcel of his own work.[57]

Dio reflects on his task as a historian from a theoretical point of view.[58] In a fragment at the beginning of his work he discusses the relationship of truth and style: he does not think that his aesthetic style is at odds with narrating the truth (1.1.2). Rather, he points out, it is difficult to find out the truth because of the information available. Dio complains about the restricted access to the material he needs and about the possibilities for research under the emperors, who influence the kind of information and the way it is given (53.19.1–6):[59] as many things have been dealt with secretly, one cannot check whether the information that reached the public was really true or not, he complains; according to Dio, many versions existed that did not coincide with the facts. He concludes that in his imperial narrative he will state everything in accordance with the reports that have been given out, whether they contained the truth or not (εἴτ' ὄντως οὕτως εἴτε καὶ ἑτέρως πως ἔχει, 53.19.6), but that he will additionally give his own opinion wherever his reading, hearsay, and what he has seen allow him to form another judgment (53.19.6).

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the original Ciceronian text. For Dio reading non-historical literature cf. Millar 1961, 22. For Dio's bilingualism and his consulting Latin sources cf. Freyburger-Galland 1992, 127; Freyburger-Galland 1997, 628.

56 On Dio's sources and *Quellenforschung* cf. Schwartz 1899/1957, 406–446; Vrind 1926, 321–327; Millar 1964, 34–38; Townend 1961 (for traces in Dio of Cluvius Rufus, Aufidius Bassus, and Pliny the Elder); Wirth 1985, 39–43; Freyburger-Galland 1992, 126; Simons 2009, 5–9. There is an overview of *Quellenforschung* in Martinelli 1999, 25–30. For an analysis of Dio's work as a literary text cf. Gowing 1992, 39–50 (summarizing *Quellenforschung* on Dio and Appian); Gowing 1997, 2563–2564. The debate about *Quellenforschung* emerged again with the monograph of Manuwald 1979, who explains contradictions and inconsistencies in Dio's account by his use of different sources: he argues that Dio was not able to or did not want to resolve these tensions, or was not even aware of them at all (e.g. Manuwald 1979, 26; 167; 275; 277; 284). The opposite is held by Steidle 1988, 224 and Rich 1989, 91; 108: they explain ambivalences and inconsistencies not by *Quellenforschung*, but as a literary phenomenon.

57 Cf. Gowing 1992, 60 on Cassius Dio and Appian: "If they have indeed taken over from time to time their sources' interpretations and perspectives, we are nevertheless justified in regarding those interpretations and perspectives as their own." Dio's originality with regard to his sources is highlighted by Simons 2009, 301.

58 See Hose 1994, 444–448.

59 For Dio's difficulties in getting information cf. Zimmermann 1999a, 48–51; Schmidt 1999, 96.

This makes the information he can acquire for his own times even more important, since Dio can additionally draw on his own experience and on reports of eyewitnesses that reach back to the end of Trajan's reign.[60] His entrance into the senate in 182 CE is thus a watershed moment: Dio underlines that from now on he is an eyewitness to the events reported and so he will now be able to give more details (λέγω δὲ ταῦτά τε καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ οὐκ ἐξ ἀλλοτρίας ἔτι παραδόσεως ἀλλ' ἐξ οἰκείας ἤδη τηρήσεως, "I state these and subsequent facts, not, as hitherto, on the authority of others' reports, but from my own observation", 73[72].4.2; καὶ μέντοι καὶ τἆλλα πάντα τὰ ἐπ' ἐμοῦ πραχθέντα καὶ λεπτουργήσω καὶ λεπτολογήσω μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ πρότερα, "and, indeed, all the other events that took place in my lifetime I shall describe with more exactness and detail than earlier occurrences", 73[72].18.4). The status of eyewitness influences Cassius Dio's depiction of the events much more than in the case of Tacitus. In Dio, the narratological situation also changes: Dio now starts to use the first person singular for himself and the first person plural for the senators.[61] The overt primary narrator, who had until now seemed to be an external narrator, becomes part of the narrative, an internal narrator. He identifies himself with the author and with one of his characters, but still knows more than his corresponding character could know: he is informed about the thoughts and feelings of his characters. He continues to comment on his narrative, makes his readers aware of himself, and becomes involved in the events and topics that he presents.

Contemporary history, as depicted by this first-person narrator, has an enormous influence on the whole work and can be regarded as the crucial element upon which the character of the *Roman History* depends.[62] In the three generations preceding Cassius Dio—or, to put it differently, between Tacitus and Cassius Dio[63]—there is no surviving non-panegyrical contemporary history.[64] With Cassius Dio, a senator enters the historiographical scene writing a work that is markedly different from other depictions of the period. The

60 For oral reports as sources cf. 80(79).7.4. For Dio's autopsy see e.g. 75(74).14.4–6 (his visit to Byzantium, including criticism of Septimius Severus' conquest and treatment of the city). Cf. Freyburger-Galland 2003, 115.

61 On Dio as a narrator in general cf. Hidber 2004; Kemezis 2014, 94–98.

62 Cf. Bleicken 1962, 445–446; 450; 454; Flach 1973, 133–134; Reinhold 1986, 14–15; Gowing 1992, 293–294; Gowing 1997, 2560; Hose 2007, 465–467; Hose 2011, 124. Differently Schmidt 1997, 2596 ("Zeitgeschichte ist ihm jedoch nicht der neuralgische Punkt, von welchem ausgehend er eine historische Gesamtsicht entwirft oder gar ein konsistentes Geschichtsmodell entwickelt").

63 Cf. Kemezis 2010, 318–319.

64 Cf. Zimmermann 1999a, 45–47; Kemezis 2010. See also the overview of Sidebottom 2007 and of Zecchini 2016.

contemporaneous autobiography of Septimius Severus was probably similar to the panegyrical biography that Aelius Antipater wrote about him, and it is not unlikely that they were both known to Dio.[65] They represent a discourse about political rule in which Dio participates too.[66] Dio is part of ongoing negotiations about contemporary emperors and their imperial representation. He corrects other versions and interpretations of imperial representation, for example when he discusses the suicide of Albinus and points out that he will not recount everything that Septimius Severus has written about that subject, but will state what really happened (76[75].7.3). He underlines this role of correcting official events also when he writes against Caracalla's own reports (79[78].2.1). In addition to such explicit corrections, in his version of the events at Hatra Dio reacts to the official version of events or the imperial representation without making it explicit.[67] Zeev Rubin has shown how the propaganda of Septimius Severus styled the siege of Hatra in the Second Parthian War differently from Cassius Dio.[68] We can see from these two different versions that the meaning of a contemporary event was still being negotiated: official imperial representation tried to present Hatra as a great military success; Dio's critical version reacts to and corrects these attempts.

2 Imperial Representation in the *Roman History*

2.1 *Topics of Representation and Transgressions*

Cassius Dio treats all the topics of imperial representation as described in chapter 3: the emperors' military actions, their building projects, their forms of public entertainment, their speeches, their representation as divine, and the atmosphere of their reigns. Whereas there were no examples of Domitian's buildings, public entertainment, or divinity in Tacitus (cf. p.64–76; 79–88) due to the loss of the relevant passages in the *Histories*, Dio's text does provide examples of their deconstruction: Domitian's statues are deconstructed as superfluous and hubristic, being of silver and gold (τοσαῦτα αὐτῷ ἐψηφίσ-

65 For Septimius Severus' autobiography cf. Rubin 1980, 133–193. For Aelius Antipater's and Septimius Severus' own biography cf. Sidebottom 2007, 55. On Aelius Antipater and Philostratus as possible sources for Dio's text about Septimius Severus cf. Moscovich 2004, 358–359.

66 See also Philostratus and his depiction of Caracalla as tyrant. However, Whitmarsh 2007, 35–38 is critical of a political reading of Philostratus' *VA*.

67 See also Davenport/Mallan 2014, 657–658 for Dio reacting to positive representations of Commodus e.g. in Oppian.

68 Cf. Rubin 1975.

θῃ ὥστε πᾶσαν ὀλίγου δεῖν τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν ὑπ' αὐτὸν οὖσαν εἰκόνων αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνδριάντων καὶ ἀργυρῶν καὶ χρυσῶν ἐμπλησθῆναι, "so many honours were voted to him that almost the whole world, so far as it was under his dominion, was filled with his silver and golden images and statues", 67.8.1). His Alban villa figures as a place of secretiveness and death.[69] His public entertainment is transgressive and brings death to those participating in it (67.8.1–9.6).[70] His claim to divinity is mentioned twice (ἤδη γὰρ καὶ θεὸς ἠξίου νομίζεσθαι, 67.4.7; cf. 67.13.4) and the thunderbolt, an accessory of Jupiter, with whom the historical Domitian identified,[71] reappears in the opening passage of the depiction of this reign, where a metaphor describes his violent attacks on people (πολλὰ μὲν ὥσπερ σκηπτὸς ὀξέως ἐμπίπτων τισὶν ἐλυμαίνετο, "he often attacked people with the sudden violence of a thunderbolt", 67.1.1).

A remarkable topic of imperial representation is education, which Dio uses as a point of critique.[72] Like other authors of the Second Sophistic Dio points out that (Greek) education is crucial to an emperor.[73] Contemporary emperors are portrayed as valuing or neglecting education. The contrast between Marcus Aurelius, who is highly praised as educated and literate (e.g. 72[71].35.1), and his son Commodus, who kills men of *paideia* (73[72].5.3), is the most striking. Dio's good emperor Pertinax is able to convict a fraudster, who gives a false identity, by demonstrating the fraud's lack of education (73[72].6.5). This episode clearly illustrates that for Dio education is a main feature of a person's identity.[74] Thus Septimius Severus, who appears only as skilled soldier and military leader, is contrasted with Albinus, who is of elevated origin and education (ἦν δὲ ὁ μὲν Ἀλβῖνος καὶ τῷ γένει καὶ τῇ παιδείᾳ προήκων, ἅτερος δὲ τὰ πολέμια κρείττων καὶ δεινὸς στρατηγῆσαι, 76[75].6.2); Dio's Caracalla disdains people who value education (78[77].11.2). This lack of interest in or hatred for education on the part of contemporary emperors is already foreshadowed in Dio's Nero and Domi-

69 See p.238.

70 See Schulz 2016, 280–292.

71 As mentioned on p.80 Domitian was the first *princeps* to be depicted with Jupiter's thunderbolt on coins. See Leberl 2004, 52–53.

72 Cf. the overview of Cassius Dio on the *paideia* of all *principes* in Jones 2016, 309–311. Education is also an important attribute of senators. They quote Homer (79[78].30.1), with a citation from whom Dio ends his work (80.5.3); see Burden-Strevens 2015, 301; Gowing 2016, 133–135. The high estimation of this author ties in with Dio's critique of Hadrian, who is said to have replaced Homer with Antimachus because he envied Homer (69.4.6). See Schmitz 1997, 48; 52–53; 105 on Dio on education. For the importance of *paideia* in the roughly contemporary Herodian (and his portrait of Severus Alexander) see Zimmermann 1999b, 232–251.

73 Cf. Swain 1996, 406–407.

74 Cf. Gleason 2011, 40; 42 on 73(72).5.3–6.

tian. Nero neglects the wise education of Seneca and Burrus.[75] Domitian kills a number of learned men,[76] and he himself is depicted with a stylus that he uses not for literary purposes, but to impale flies (καὶ τὰς μυίας γραφείοις κατεκέντει, 65[66].9.4)—an anecdote to which we will return in different contexts.[77]

The emperor must be moderate and must stay within certain bounds; otherwise his behaviour is evaluated as negative transgression. Such a transgression may involve social norms, or moral concepts such as manliness, modesty, or apt humour.[78] A good example of Dio's interest in depicting imperial representation as transgressive is provided by his portrayal of Commodus. The emperor commits all sorts of transgressions when he receives honours that his father Marcus Aurelius had been granted because people loved him, but in Commodus' case only because they are frightened; when he gives his own name to Rome, to the legions, and to the day on which these decisions were made; when he has a golden statue of himself erected among a vast number of statues; and when he renames all the months with his own new titles, such as *Amazonius* or *Invictus* (73[72].15.1–6).[79] This passage about Commodus' transgressions follows after the depiction of the worst plague ever known to Dio (νόσος μεγίστη ὧν ἐγὼ οἶδα, 73[72].14.3). The depiction of Commodus picks up this plague, and characterizes the emperor as even surpassing it: he was, so Dio, a greater curse to the Romans than any pestilence or any crime (ἦν δὲ ἁπάντων νοσημάτων καὶ ἁπάντων κακουργημάτων χαλεπώτερος Ῥωμαίοις ὁ Κόμμοδος, 73[72].15.1).

In addition to depictions of such transgressions Dio sometimes codes—on an abstract level—the figure of transgression itself in a negative way. Nero is said to have surpassed Caligula in his shamelessness because he thought it was one of his tasks as emperor not to lag behind anyone even in the basest deeds (τὸ μηδὲ ἐν τοῖς κακίστοις μηδενὸς ὑστερίζειν, 61.5.1). Similarly, the idea of emulation or surpassing someone is deconstructed as something negative when Geta and Caracalla are described as brothers who try to surpass each other in their moral transgressions (77[76].7.1).

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75 Cf. Jones 2016, 310 on 61(60).32.3; 61.4.5–5.1.

76 Cf. Jones 2016, 310 on Mettius Pompusianus, Maternus, Arulenus Rusticus, Herennius Senecio.

77 For this anecdote in Suetonius and Cassius Dio cf. Newlands 2014, 328–329.

78 These transgressions will be studied more thoroughly in chapter 7.1.

79 Titles are not empty names for Dio, but meaningful honours. He sometimes praises people who refrain from accepting certain titles (e.g. Pompey in 37.21.1) or reprehends their misuse. Cf. Dio on the title "Imperator" in 43.44.2–6, on the title "Augustus" in 53.16.7–8, and on Trajan's title "Optimus" in 68.23.1. See also Gowing 1997, 2583–2584.

2.2 *Transgressions and Honours: Caesar and Augustus*

The aforementioned transgressive statues of Domitian are presented in the text as being the result of votes or honours awarded to the emperor (ἐψηφίσθη, 67.8.1). Giving and accepting honours, or not giving or refusing them, is one of the most important social interactions between senators and emperors in Dio.[80] Dio's critique is directed at both the senate and the emperors. The Neronian senate, for example, is depicted as announcing so many sacrifices and days of thanksgiving for Nero's artistic victories in Greece that the whole year was not enough for them (62[63].18.3).[81] For the senate under Domitian, Dio explains that honours given to emperors such as Domitian were only decreed to prevent the emperors from suspecting that the people saw through them—as they would have done if the honours had been few and insignificant (67.4.1). And already Dio's long list of honours attributed to Caesar (44.3.1–8.1) is not free of criticism of the senators, who are said to have inflated Caesar's pride by these honours (44.3.1–2).[82]

Dio's thoughts about the right measure or degree in the imperial representation of Nero, Domitian, and other *principes* seem prompted by the proto-imperial figure of Julius Caesar.[83] In Dio's presentation, Caesar figures as immoderate and arrogant (e.g. οὐδὲν μέτριον ἔπραττεν, ἀλλ' ὡς καὶ ἀθάνατος ὢν ὑπερεφρόνησε, "he showed no moderation, but was filled with arrogance, as if immortal", 43.41.3); as a politician who is greedy for money; but also extremely skilled in his treatment of various social groups—he makes the people, the senators, and the knights his friends (42.51.3–5). But his laudable deeds, including those characterized by clemency, are analysed and deconstructed as part of his political strategies. Caesar oversteps certain boundaries that had not been transgressed by anyone before: with regard to their quantity and their quality they are innovations. However, they are not condemned by Dio: several times

80 Caligula accepts all honours at once (59.3.1–2). For Commodus' transgressive honours see 73(72).15.2–6.

81 The narrator Dio here presents the same critique that Tacitus' Gaius Cassius voices about Nero's honours after Corbulo's military success in Parthia in 58 CE (in *Ann.* 13.41.4). Cf. p.100.

82 Tiberius is also portrayed as arrogant due to the sacrifices in his honour, which he receives "as though he had accomplished something by valour" (54.9.5–6). Dio's Caligula later shows the senators that their behaviour in attributing honours is contradictory. If they thought as badly of Tiberius as they claim, argues Dio's Caligula, they should not have bestowed so many honours upon him during his lifetime (59.16.4).

83 For Dio's Caesar (and the technique of focalization) cf. Pelling 2009a, 515–519. Pompey is also characterized as proud and craving glory. But Dio points out several times that he accepted existing boundaries, e.g. in 37.21.3–4; 37.23.2–4.

he points out that Caesar's actions and honours were, despite their innovative status, not unconstitutional, as they were undertaken and given in accord with the senators (e.g. 43.27.1). It would thus be too simple to say that Dio evaluates representation only by its immoderate and transgressive character. Rather, he always takes into account whether the transgression is legitimate or not. Transgression is not good or bad *per se*. It becomes the object of critique only if it is not legitimized by the senators.

That Caesar plays an important role in Dio's reflections on the relationship of transgression and legitimation, senators and *principes*, is also suggested by Dio's explicit general thoughts about the depiction of honours in his work: he presents them in the context of the numerous honours and flattery of Caesar after Pompey's death (42.19.1–2). Dio here excludes two kinds of honours from his narrative: he will not report honours that were not innovative, i.e. traditional honours which had been awarded to people already before Caesar; nor will he mention honours that were innovative, but were only discussed in theory and then not realized in fact (ὅσα ἤτοι καὶ ἑτέροις τισὶ πρότερον ἐψήφισται, …, ἢ καινὰ μὲν καὶ τότε ἐσενεχθέντα πρῶτον ἦν, οὐ μέντοι καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ Καίσαρος ἐβεβαιώθη, 42.19.3).[84] This process of selection, which is presented as undertaken in order not to weary the reader, has serious effects on the depiction that follows. When Dio leaves out non-innovative honours, the tradition of established honours disappears from the text. This means that Dio's focus, on the surface of the text, will be on innovation, even if there were traditional honours and even if they outweighed the innovative ones. Innovative honours are underlined additionally by not mentioning honours that are only thought of, only hypothetical in nature. This practice, prompted by the depiction of Caesar's honours, will determine the narrative for the rest of his work: "This same plan I shall follow in my subsequent account, adhering the more strictly to it, as the honours proposed continually grew more numerous and more absurd (καὶ μᾶλλόν γε ὅσῳ καὶ πλείω καὶ ἀτοπώτερα ἀεὶ ἐσήγετο). Only such as had some special and extraordinary importance and were confirmed will be related (42.19.4)." Passages in which Dio breaks his own law and talks explicitly about other honours hence attract special attention.[85]

In Dio's discussion of Octavian/Augustus we also find several programmatic views of emperors either keeping the right measure or transgressing boundaries and about their representation and the honours they receive. In his speech in favour of monarchy, mentioned above, Dio's Maecenas advises Octavian not

84 Cf. similarly 43.46.1, where Dio is also explicit about his criteria of selection: he has chosen to mention only the notable measures that were passed in honour of Caesar's victory.

85 See e.g. 43.14.7 on Caesar declining honours which Dio does not mention.

to allow exceptional honours, nor to permit golden and silver images of himself (εἰκόνας σου χρυσᾶς μὲν ἢ καὶ ἀργυρᾶς) or temples to be raised for him (52.35.1–4). Maecenas recommends that Octavian never make use of his full power against his subjects, and never put into practice every act that his power would allow him (52.38.1). Another, stricter boundary is established by Dio's Livia when she states in the famous dialogue with her husband that he must avoid not only unjust action, but even the suspicion of it (καὶ δεῖ σε, ὦ Αὔγουστε, μὴ μόνον μηδὲν ἀδικεῖν, ἀλλὰ μηδὲ δοκεῖν, 55.19.3). Augustus' behaviour is indeed evaluated as generally moderate by Dio (ἐν δὲ δὴ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐμετρίαζεν, 54.3.1). When he has his Augustus suspect that Tiberius may become demented (καὶ μέντοι καὶ αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνον ὑποπτεύσας πῃ ἐκφρονήσειν, 55.13.2), this not only anticipates Tiberius' later actions as transgressions, it also confirms his own behaviour as keeping within the set boundaries.[86]

86 The difference between Augustus and Tiberius is mirrored in the behaviour of their most important allies. While Agrippa appears modest in declining a triumph (54.11.6), Sejanus is depicted as a victim of the excessive and novel honours that were bestowed upon him (58.12.6).

CHAPTER 7

Strategies of Deconstruction in Cassius Dio

1 Negative Connotations

1.1 *Foreign and Unmanly*

As in Tacitus, an important device of deconstruction, of creating a negative image of an emperor based on formerly positive or neutral interpretations of him, is to interpret imperial representation as transgressive through negative connotations. Some emperors in Dio are depicted as transgressing the boundary of Roman manliness: they are pictured as foreign and female, two reproaches that are closely intertwined in Dio too.[1] As in Tacitus, these reproaches are more fruitfully applied to Nero than to Domitian, and above all to Nero's performances as artist and in marriages. But the reproach that a Roman man is not behaving as a Roman man should pertains to several figures in Dio's work, the most obvious example for this sort of denigration probably being Marc Antony. He features as an un-Roman man contrasted to the Roman Octavian.[2] Among the contemporary emperors, Elagabalus' effeminacy stands out in Dio.[3]

Dio's use of foreignness as a negative characteristic becomes more complex when he has foreigners take a perspective from outside, to look at the Romans and comment on their behaviour negatively. This strategy works on the assumption that it matters what foreigners think about Rome. Dio's Seneca and Burrus, who act according to this principle, try to conceal from an Armenian legation the degree of power held by Agrippina. They prevent Nero's mother from behaving as a ruler in front of the legation, so that the Empire's weak-

1 For Tacitus see p.101–108.

2 See e.g. 48.30.1. Dio's Octavian makes abundant use of such depictions of Marc Antony in his speech before Actium (50.25.1–5; μήτ' οὖν Ῥωμαῖον εἶναί τις αὐτὸν νομιζέτω, ἀλλά τινα Αἰγύπτιον, μήτ' Ἀντώνιον ὀνομαζέτω, ἀλλά τινα Σαραπίωνα, "therefore, let no one count him a Roman, but rather Egyptian, nor call him Antony, but rather Serapion", 50.27.1). The portrayal of Antony given by Octavian draws heavily on a negative image of Egyptians. According to Dio's Octavian they revere reptiles and other animals as gods, embalm their bodies to give the impression of immortality, they are cowards and slaves of a woman instead of a man (50.24.6–7). Octavian's intimates too are sceptical about Egyptians: Agrippa restricts the practice of Egyptian rites (54.6.6); Maecenas argues against foreign religious rites and new gods who could incite foreign forms of life in general (52.36.2).

3 On Elagabalus' effeminacy see Osgood 2016, 183–185.

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ness does not become apparent to the foreigners (ὥστε μὴ καὶ ἐς τοὺς βαρβάρους τὸ νόσημα τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐκφανῆναι, 61.3.4). It is from such a perspective that Dio presents an extremely disgraceful event for Rome: when he not only presents Roman knights and senators performing as dancers in the circus and theatre under Nero (62[61].17.3–4) but also has foreigners cite the names of these noble Roman participants to each other (62[61].17.5):

> καὶ ἐδακτυλοδείκτουν γε αὐτοὺς ἀλλήλοις, καὶ ἐπέλεγον Μακεδόνες μέν "οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τοῦ Παύλου ἔκγονος", Ἕλληνες δὲ "οὗτος τοῦ Μομμίου", Σικελιῶται "ἴδετε τὸν Κλαύδιον", Ἠπειρῶται "ἴδετε τὸν Ἄππιον", Ἀσιανοὶ τὸν Λούκιον, Ἴβηρες τὸν Πούπλιον, Καρχηδόνιοι Ἀφρικανόν, Ῥωμαῖοι δὲ πάντας.

> So they pointed them out to one another and made their comments, Macedonians saying: "There is the descendant of Paulus"; Greeks, "There is Mummius' descendant"; Sicilians, "Look at Claudius"; Epirotes, "Look at Appius"; Asiatics naming Lucius, Iberians Publius, Carthaginians Africanus, and Romans naming them all.

The Tacitean narrator, talking about the same or a similar event, omits their names out of respect for their own descendants (Tac. *Ann.* 14.14.3). Dio, by contrast, makes use of them as part of his strategy of deconstruction. In his text, the names are given by foreigners who even point out that these people are descendants of famous Romans: the effect of disgrace is all the greater since this piece of information is not given by the primary narrator but by a secondary narrator who is himself not a Roman. The same technique is applied to women too. Feminine conduct by an emperor is described as feminine not only by the narrator but also by women in the narrative. A foreigner and a woman, Boudicca, queen of the Britons, in a speech addressed to another foreign female, the goddess Andraste (62.6.2), characterizes Nero as woman (ὄνομα μὲν γὰρ ἀνδρὸς ἔχει, ἔργῳ δὲ γυνή ἐστι, 62.6.3; ἡ Νερωνὶς ἡ Δομιτία, 62.6.5) and the Romans as unmanly (62.6.4).[4]

The reproach of effeminacy often entails that the ruler is dependent on and guided by a woman. Marc Antony, again, serves as prototype. He is portrayed as the slave of Cleopatra both by the narrator (48.24.2; 50.5.1–4) and by Dio's Octavian (50.28.3; 5). Marc Antony's unmanly un-Romanness is mirrored by Cleopatra, whose status as a female foreigner is used to discredit her too: she takes flight from the battle of Actium, as the narrator puts it, in accordance

4 See Schulz 2014, 415.

with her nature as a woman and an Egyptian (ἀπό τε τοῦ γυναικείου καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ Αἰγυπτίου, 50.33.2). Among the emperors Claudius in particular is characterized as dependent on his wives and freedmen (60.2.4), who turn Claudius into a bad emperor (60.14.1). Claudius is portrayed as the slave of his women (61[60].31.8).[5] His niece and wife Agrippina first makes him depend on her (61[60].33.1; 3[a]), then on her son Nero. Structurally, the relationship of Agrippina and Nero appears as a repetition and augmentation of the relationship of Livia and Tiberius.[6]

Another literary device that characterizes Dio's Nero as feminine is the description of his own boundary-breaking in gender and sex.[7] When Dio's Nero marries Sporus, whom he has turned into a woman, in Greece, Dio points out that the emperor was at that time already married as a woman to Pythagoras (62[63].13.1–2).[8] In doing so, he describes Nero as conducting two unnatural marriages, which supplement each other in breaking different norms and two laws of marriage at once: he is married as a man to a woman, who is not really a woman, but a eunuch; and he is married as a woman (καίπερ Πυθαγόρᾳ τινὶ ἐξελευθέρῳ γεγαμημένος,[9] 62.28.2) with Pythagoras, a man. We do not learn, at least in the surviving text, that at the same time Nero was, in accordance with all norms, married to Messalina, and that she was probably present in Greece.[10] This piece of information, which would show Dio's Nero in the traditional role of a husband, would spoil the transgressions of gender and sex depicted.

1.2 *Hubristic, or against Nature*

Dio regards modest behaviour in general as a virtue that leads to success. He therefore interprets negatively imperial forms of representation that transgress modesty.[11] As in Tacitus such patterns can be portrayed as hubrist-

5 For Messalina's power over Claudius see 61(60).29.6.

6 See e.g. 57.3.3–6, 57.12.1–6, and 58.2.1–3 for Tiberius' reaction to Livia's death. People speculate that Tiberius owes his emperorship to his mother; for Nero, this is asserted without any doubt. While Tiberius removes his mother from public affairs and finally moves to Capri himself to get away from her (57.12.6), Nero removes Agrippina altogether.

7 On Nero's femininity in Cassius Dio cf. Gowing 1997, 2580–2583.

8 On Nero breaching boundaries of gender and sex as regards Sporus see also Dio Chrys. *Or.* 21.6: Dio mentions the castration and the changing of Sporus' name to Poppaea's as an example of lawless, unlimited power.

9 Cf. the same use of the middle voice (ἐγήματο) for Elagabalus in 80(79).14.4.

10 Cf. Edmondson 1992, 240.

11 For modesty as a virtue in Dio cf. Kuhn-Chen 2002, 149–152. Modesty can also be depicted by pointing out what people do not do. Cassius Dio presents, for example, a selection of deeds that Claudius does not undertake at the birth of his son, and so indicates Claudius' modest behaviour (60.12.5).

ic.[12] A specific form of hubris, by which an emperor associates himself with a god, is used in the depiction of Dio's Domitian.[13] Dio draws attention to Domitian's reverence for Minerva already in his introductory characterization (67.1.2). This reverence is nuanced negatively when it is contrasted with the assertion that Domitian did not feel anything for human beings, except for a few women (ἀνθρώπων δὲ ἐφίλησε μὲν ἀληθῶς οὐδένα πλὴν γυναικῶν τινων, 67.1.3). Domitian is thus presented as someone who feels closer to the gods than to people. This contrast ties in with Domitian's isolation from his fellows, which he himself desires. The peak of deconstructing Domitian's representation through the attribution of divinity is the famous contention that Domitian proudly called himself in speeches and written documents "master" and "god" (ἤδη γὰρ καὶ θεὸς ἠξίου νομίζεσθαι, καὶ δεσπότης καλούμενος καὶ θεὸς ὑπερηγάλλετο, 67.4.7). In the epitomized version of the text this contention presents the climax of an anecdote that itself illustrates Domitian's arrogance: after the victory of his general Flaccus over the Nasamones Dio's Domitian proudly claims that he has forbidden the Nasamones to exist (67.4.6). Dio underlines Domitian's own enthusiasm for his title as "master and god" and supports this contention by another story: a certain Juventius Celsus was accused of having played a role in a conspiracy against Domitian. But he saved himself from a condemnation by calling Domitian "master and god" several times (as did others), according to Dio, and by offering to work for him as an informer (67.13.4). The story is hardly plausible,[14] but it puts emphasis on Domitian's claim to divinity.

By contrast, Dio's Nero is not portrayed as arrogantly divine, but as playing the role of a wild beast in satisfying his sexual appetite (62[63].13.2). It can also be used as an argument against an emperor that he does not strive at all for representation as divine: Dio's Caracalla does not want to be called a god. This potentially good form of representation is coded as negative through Caracalla's alleged motive for his denial: he does not want to do anything that is worthy of a god (ὅτι οὐδὲν ἄξιον θεοῦ πράττειν ἤθελεν, 78[77].5.1).

Before and after Nero and Domitian, Dio's Caligula and Caracalla stand out as emperors whose forms of representation are coded as divine and hubristic.

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12 For hubris as opposed to *moderatio* in Tacitus see p.96–101.

13 For divinity as a panegyrical form of representation see p.80–82.

14 Dio claims that Juventius Celsus was in fact set free, but always found excuses not to inform on anyone. He is said to have outlived Domitian (67.13.4). Cf. Murison 1999, 257, who calls this "denigratory fiction, perhaps even put about by Celsus himself—*after* Domitian's death!" For an equally implausible story see 67.11.5 on Lusianus Proclus.

Dio's Caligula orders that temples be erected for him and that sacrifices be made to himself as to a god (καὶ ναοὺς ἑαυτῷ καὶ θυσίας ὡς καὶ θεῷ γίγνεσθαι ἐκέλευσε, 59.4.4). He almost destroys the whole senate because it does not vote him divine honours (59.25.5), enjoys himself in the roles of Neptune, Hercules, Bacchus, Apollo, and all the other divinities (59.26.6), talks to the goddess of the moon (59.27.6), and calls himself Jupiter Latiaris (59.28.5). The close connection between Dio's Caligula and his representation as divine provides the basis for Dio's sarcastic comment about Caligula's death, by which, according to Dio, he found out that he was not a god after all (59.30.1). Among Dio's contemporary emperors, Commodus presents himself as Hercules (73[72].15.2; 3; 5; 6). But, in an anecdote which Dio discusses, Commodus' representation as Hercules is not used to praise him at all: a picture, which displays the Herculean motifs of a boy strangling two serpents and a lion pursuing a fawn, is interpreted as showing Commodus as Hercules, a style of representation that goes back to the historical Commodus. Yet he had strangled two of his victims, identified as two Quintilii, and hunted a third one, a certain Sextus (73[72].7.1–2). According to Dio, those looking at the image therefore re-coded the elements negatively when they refer them to Commodus. The codes have been reversed: strangling the snakes is not self-defence but murder, and the lion is turned from a symbol of power into a symbol of persecution.

In accord with their own hubris, some emperors neglect divine signs. Dio's gods do not directly influence the events depicted in the narrative,[15] but one of the most significant features of Dio's concept of history is his opinion that important events are announced by divine signs, even if they are only interpreted as such in hindsight. For Dio, these are not supernatural signs; he rather regards them as a part of science.[16] We can identify characters in Dio who care about such signs and try to understand them in contrast to characters that do not. Cicero (37.35.4), for example, as well as Pompey (41.14.1), Octavian (46.46.2–3), Livia (48.52.3–4), and Vitellius (64[65].16.1) care about divine signs. Significantly, Nero and Domitian are not depicted as reading them or interpreting them the right way. At Nero's death both nature and imperial buildings give signs of his downfall, which he ignores (63.26.5).

15 Cf. Kuhn-Chen 2002, 245 on *prodigia* as a "nicht zwingend notwendige Dimension" for the course of history.

16 Cf. Swan 2004, 8–9. A rational explanation for natural phenomena such as solar or lunar eclipses does not seem to contradict their character as divine signs. We see a strong interest by the narrator in his report of Claudius' efforts to demystify the events of a solar and a lunar eclipse by a scientific explanation (60.26.1–5).

Unlike the gods, nature does influence the events depicted in the narrative directly. To oppose nature can be depicted as another form of hubris. Like Tacitus, Dio deconstructs imperial actions and representation by presenting them as directed against nature.[17] Weather, landscapes, or animals are described as enemies of the emperor: they make his transgressive behaviour apparent, comment on it, or try to prevent it. Especially in his depiction of Nero, Dio makes use of this device, for example when Nero's murder of Britannicus is revealed because of a natural event. Dio's Nero is said to have killed Britannicus by a poison that had made his skin livid. Britannicus' dead body had therefore been smeared with gypsum. But when the body is carried outside, rain washes the gypsum away.[18] In this story, nature takes away the layer that had literally made it possible to hide the misdeed.

While Dio only hints that nature plays an active part in the narrative, he has the narrator confirm nature's role in the murder of Agrippina explicitly. Dio's Nero plans the matricide on the open sea with the help of a ship that has been tampered with. Dio points out that the sea did not want to allow this crime, nor to be the place of this tragedy, nor take responsibility for such a deed (ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ ἤνεγκεν ἡ θάλασσα τὴν μέλλουσαν ἐπ' αὐτῇ τραγῳδίαν ἔσεσθαι, οὐδ' ὑπέμεινε τὴν ψευδολογίαν τῆς ἀνοσιουργίας ἀναδέξασθαι, 62[61].13.3). This underlines the contrast between nature's behaviour on the one hand and the theatricality and unnaturalness of Nero's acts on the other hand. That the sea focalizes the events as "tragedy" is extremely apt since the events have been inspired by theatre: the idea for the murder arose from a manipulated ship in a theatre performance (62[61].12.2). In Dio's narrative, nature does indeed at least delay the murder of Agrippina. After her death, especially during the sacrifices that are hypocritically held in her honour, nature gives heavenly signs of criticism: the sun undergoes a total eclipse; in the circus, the elephants carrying the wagon of Augustus stand still at the seats of the senators and refuse to go any further; a thunderbolt strikes Nero's dinner (62[61].16.4–5). Nero also figures as the direct opponent of nature in the canal project in Corinth. It is depicted as the violation of an anthropomorphized nature: the earth spouts blood, groans, and phantoms appear (αἷμά τε γὰρ τοῖς πρώτοις ἁψαμένοις τῆς γῆς ἀνέβλυσεν, καὶ οἰμω-

17 Cf. p.68 on Nero's building endeavours in Tacitus as directed against nature.

18 See 61.7.4: ὑετὸς δὲ διὰ τῆς ἀγορᾶς αὐτοῦ διαγομένου πολύς, ὑγρᾶς ἔτι οὔσης τῆς γύψου, ἐπιπεσὼν πᾶσαν αὐτὴν ἀπέκλυσεν, ὥστε τὸ δεινὸν μὴ μόνον ἀκούεσθαι ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁρᾶσθαι ("But as the body was being carried through the Forum, a heavy rain that fell while the gypsum was still moist washed it all off, so that the crime was known not only by what people heard but also by what they saw"). On the function of the rain at Britannicus' funeral see also part Five, p.362–364.

γαὶ μυκηθμοί τέ τινες ἐξηκούοντο, καὶ εἴδωλα πολλὰ ἐφαντάζετο, 62[63].16.1). The earthquakes occurring during his flight are explained as caused by the ghosts of the people that Nero killed (63.28.1).[19]

There are not as many instances in which imperial representation is connoted as unnatural with regard to Domitian. However, nature plays a vital part in an anecdote about Domitian's death. A prophet, who foretold Domitian's death, also predicts that he himself will be torn into pieces by dogs. In order to refute the prophet and to prove him a liar Domitian wanted to have him burnt to death. But, so the anecdote goes, the fire of the pyre was extinguished by a rain shower; dogs then came and tore him apart (67.16.3). The rainfall is thus an integral part of the narrative that shows the prophecy to be true and proves Domitian wrong.

1.3 *Not Funny, but Crazy*

It is typical of Dio's deconstruction through negative connotations to depict bad rulers as having either no humour or a kind of humour that harms society.[20] Nero turns the horrible fate of his relations into an occasion for jokes and laughter. He has Plautus murdered, then looks at his head and says: "I did not know that he had such a big nose!" (62.14.1). It is not only here that Dio uses the description of how people behave when they see the head of a former opponent (or of someone else) to characterize them.[21] Several other characters also maltreat a person's head verbally or physically. There is one example of the opposite, i.e. the good behaviour of a ruler who cannot even bring himself to look at a severed head. Dio reserves this conduct for his ideal emperor Marcus

19 In a fragment of John of Antioch (fr. 91, v. 35–38) Nero's flight is additionally prompted by a thunderbolt that strikes his table.

20 Emperors are evaluated not only by their own humour, but also by the way they react to humour, irony, and the wit of other people (cf. Beard 2014, 129–135 on good and bad emperors and their styles of joking). Dio does not often describe situations in which people speak ironically to the emperor. An exception is the way Antistius speaks to Augustus: it is ironic and witty, and is judged the right way to address the emperor (54.15.8). We also hear of the witty remark regarding Nero's marriage to the eunuch Sporus—"Would that your father had had the same ambition and had lived with a similar consort!" (62.28.3[a]), i.e. so that Nero would never have existed—but not of Nero's reaction to it. However, the story does not fit well with the depiction of Nero's reign as a time in which one had to be extremely careful not to offend the emperor. It hence seems probable that the joke was made in Nero's times, but became public only after his death. Cf. p.42 for such hidden discourses.

21 The *locus classicus* for the maltreatment of a dead person's head is Plut. *Crass.* 33.1–4, where the Parthians integrate Crassus' head into the performance of Euripides' *Bacchae*.

Aurelius, who cannot look at the head of Cassius (72[71].38.1).[22] More frequent is the negative evaluation: we hear of Marc Antony that during the proscriptions he looked at the heads of his victims; and his wife Fulvia is said to have mistreated the head of Cicero (47.8.2–4). Brutus' head is thrown into the sea during a stormy crossing (47.49.2). Agrippina is depicted assessing the identity of Lollia Paulina's head by studying her teeth (61[60].32.4). Domitian sends the heads of those he had killed after the revolt of Antonius Saturninus to Rome to be displayed on the Forum (67.11.3). Septimius Severus mutilates Albinus' corpse and has his head sent to Rome, a clear sign for Dio that he had none of the qualities of a good ruler (76[75].7.3–4). In this group of parallels Nero's joke about the head of a dead person stands out in its lack of seriousness. It is not to be explained as an angry act of revenge, as in the other cases, and therefore appears especially inappropriate.

Some acts by eccentric emperors that are heavily criticized in the historiographical texts, such as Nero's triumph after his return from Greece (62[63].20.1–6), his marriages with Sporus and with Pythagoras (62.28.2–3; 62[63].13.1–3), and Domitian's funeral banquet (67.9.1–6), have been re-interpreted as humorous acts by recent historians. Nero's triumph after his return from Greece has been read as a satirical form of a traditional triumph, or even as a conscious non-triumph.[23] Edward Champlin has interpreted Nero's breaking of sexual norms as rational transgressions that were supposed to shock and to amuse.[24] If Nero's transgressions were humorous, they would show Nero's humour to be rather crude. But, according to Champlin, it was meant as a joke when Nero had a young man's testicles cut and then called him "Sporus", i.e. "semen". It may also have amused people that a man became a woman, or that a freedman became empress, and all this may have been understood as a funny parody of the marriage ritual by the historical Nero.[25] Nero's marriage as a woman to Pythagoras could be understood in a similar way, as we find the same elements of bizarre pantomime and transgression of norms in this event too.[26] Domitian's funeral banquet has been read in the tradition of Trimalchio's din-

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22 The conduct of Pompey is similar when he receives the body of Mithridates, which was sent to him by Mithridates' son Pharnakes (37.14.1). Dio states explicitly that Pompey did not undertake any act of revenge upon the body.

23 Champlin argues that with his performance after the journey to Greece in 67 CE, Nero wanted neither to hold a triumph nor to parody one (see Champlin 2003, 231: "ostentatiously not a triumph"; "a deliberate anti-triumph"). The emperor, rather, wanted his actions to be seen as performance art (see Champlin 2003, 234).

24 Cf. Champlin 2003, 171.

25 This is the interpretation of Champlin 2003, 149–150.

26 Cf. Champlin 2003, 169.

ner (Petron. *Sat.* 26.7–78) as an original and enjoyable performance that plays with the boundaries of life and death.[27]

Whatever the 'true intentions' of the historical Nero and Domitian may have been, we can indeed assume that these transgressive forms of imperial representation were highly ambivalent and will have been perceived in different ways already during the emperors' lifetime. From this point of view we can read Dio's depiction of these events as an attempt to narrow down a semantically ambivalent form of representation to one specific meaning. Dio's text excludes interpretations of these events that decode them as humorous or at least make them less plausible. Nero's triumph is presented in the text as breaking the boundaries of a traditional triumph.[28] This characterizes Nero as a bad emperor.[29] When Dio depicts Nero's marriage with Sporus he takes the ritual ceremony very seriously (62[63].13.1–2): Tigellinus plays the part of the bride's father, and even the wish for future children is voiced. This appears to be a parody of the ritual of marriage, but is not presented as funny by the narrator. The same serious tone accompanies the depiction of Nero's marriage to Pythagoras. What the historical Nero or some of his contemporaries may have regarded as a funny caricature of serious rituals becomes a meaningless excess in Dio's text. With Domitian's funeral banquet Cassius Dio is probably picking up reports and narratives about a dinner that really took place, which he then deconstructs by coding it as explicitly negative and morbid.[30]

The impression that fun and the emperor are incompatible is underlined by two complementary strategies in Dio. First, the emperor's idea of humour may entail the death of other people, as in the case of Nero's nocturnal excursions in Rome. Champlin points out that this kind of behaviour was not unusual for young Roman aristocrats.[31] Dio, by contrast, turns them into clear transgressions of the notion of fun, for example by stating that people died from

27 See Waters 1964, 76; Dunbabin 1986, 194–195. Cf. the overview in Schulz 2016, 289–290.

28 For Dio's idea of a traditional triumph see Lange 2016, 94–97. For Dio's interest in the boundaries of a triumph cf. his Pompey, who points out that he was the first knight to celebrate a triumph, contrary to custom (36.25.3), and his Caligula, who takes shells to Rome for his triumph as spoils of the ocean (59.25.3–4). For Nero's other triumphs or triumph-like events (after the murder of Agrippina in 59 CE; and after the Roman victory over the Parthians in 63 CE) cf. Champlin 2003, 219–223 and Lange 2016, 110–112 on Dio.

29 Cf. Beard 2007, 271: "In its simplest terms, 'good emperors' held proper triumphs for proper victories, while 'bad emperors' held sham ceremonies for empty victories."

30 For a detailed analysis of this banquet see Schulz 2016, 287–292.

31 Cf. Champlin 2003, 152: "Roaming the streets at night, looking for violent fun with his gang, Nero was not alone: that was what uninhibited aristocratic youth did in the cities of the empire." Champlin points out that Nero was 18 to 21 years old and that there are no testimonies for this kind of behaviour in later years (see Champlin 2003, 153).

Nero's behaviour (61.9.2). A second complementary strategy is to analyse as jokes actions in the text that Nero himself takes seriously. When Nero presents the invention of the water organ during the uprising of Vindex, this is presented by Dio as an example of the fact that Nero often jested (συχνὰ δὲ δὴ καὶ ἤθυρεν, 63.26.4).

These depictions of imperial behaviour as not amusing sometimes suggest that the emperors are mad. In some passages an emperor's actions are explicitly called "mad" or "crazy", more often and much more explicitly than in Tacitus. Caligula "totally loses his head" when someone calls him a demigod or a god (δεινῶς ἐξεφρόνησεν, 59.26.5). The plot that leads to his death is depicted as the consequence of his acting the madman in every way (ὡς οὖν πάντα τρόπον ἐξεμαίνετο, 59.29.1).

Such direct and explicit ascriptions of madness are used in the depiction of Nero too. When Dio's Nero takes away the territory of Cirrha from Apollo and gives it to the soldiers, one of the reasons Dio gives for this behaviour is that Nero was crazy (μανείς, 62[63].14.2). The term ἄνοια is used by the narrator for Nero's plan to live as an artist in Alexandria after he realizes that he has no allies left (63.27.2). Domitian is portrayed as feigning madness (καὶ προσέτι καὶ μωρίαν ἔστιν ὅτε προσεποιεῖτο) and as doing absurd things before his principate, such as the above-mentioned impaling of flies on a stylus (65[66].9.4). For Domitian's reign we are given a whole catalogue of forms of imperial representation that are explicitly coded as craziness (οὐ μὴν ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πλεῖον ἐπαρθεὶς ὑπ' ἀνοίας, 67.4.3–4), such as the consulate taken up ten years in a row, the censorship for a lifetime (refused by Dio's Augustus in 54.2.1), the 24 lictors accompanying him, his wearing the triumphal garb in the senate, and his renaming of the month October as "Domitianus". In the contemporary narrative, Commodus' craziness stands out. It is highlighted in the passage, mentioned above, in which all his transgressions are summarized (οὕτω καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ἐμεμήνει τὸ κάθαρμα, 73[72].15.4–5). The portrayal of Caracalla provides us with a new facet of craziness. His behaviour is analysed pathologically and described as psychological illness:[32] he is haunted by hallucinations and sees his dead father and Commodus. It is telling that Dio presents the equally mad Commodus as the only one to respond to the paranoid Caracalla (78[77].15.4).

32 See 78(77).15.3: ἐνόσει μὲν γὰρ καὶ τῷ σώματι τὰ μὲν ἐμφανέσι τὰ δὲ καὶ ἀρρήτοις ἀρρωστήμασιν, ἐνόσει δὲ καὶ τῇ ψυχῇ πικροῖς τισι φαντάσμασι ("for he was sick not only in body, partly from visible and partly from secret ailments, but in mind as well, suffering from certain distressing visions").

2 Persuasive Characters

2.1 *Characters and Actions*

For a more complex framing of imperial action as negative, the depiction of an emperor's character plays an important role which is still reflected in the epitomized text.[33] Like Tacitus, Dio employs characterization to explain behaviour and actions. It is thus crucial for the development and logic of the narrative. In the imperial period, Dio combines the annalistic scheme with biographical elements and his approach may hence be characterized as a mixture of those of Tacitus and Suetonius.[34] Dio does not write biographies in the modern sense of the word: his aim is not to show that someone's individual character is different from that of others.[35] He rather uses biographical elements to organize his historiographical text: they allow him to present his material around a dominating figure, a device that has been termed "biostructuring".[36]

Dio's characterizations guide the reader and influence the narrative. They often function as foils for other character depictions, or are used to negotiate ethical and political topics.[37] Like Plutarch (*Alex.* 1), Dio subscribes to the idea that a person's character can be explained by single, even minor actions (ἀμέλει δύο ταῦτ' εἰπὼν πάντα τὸν τρόπον αὐτοῦ δηλώσω, "indeed, two incidents that I shall now relate will reveal his whole character", 73[72].11.2). He therefore includes such minor actions in his narrative even if they are not in line with the dignity of historiography.[38] The nature of Dio's anecdotes thus lies both in their information and in their entertainment.[39] In combining direct characteriza-

33 Although Xiphilinus "tends to omit some of Dio's attempts to explain the causes of events" in general (Edmondson 1992, 29), this pertains less to explanations based on a person's character, because Xiphilinus shares Dio's interest in biographical material: "Biographical material dominates Xiphilinus' selection. The layers and details of Dio's historical narrative are stripped away to accentuate and simplify the biographical elements of Dio's history" (Mallan 2013b, 643). Cf. p.176–177.

34 Cf. Pelling 1997, 117. See also Questa 1957, 37; 39; 52 (with reference to the aforementioned biography of Arrian, which the *Suda* attributes to Dio).

35 Cf. Pelling 1997, 138.

36 See Pelling 1997, 118.

37 Cf. Mallan 2013a, 734. For the construction of Caracalla's portrait in Cassius Dio see Davenport 2012, 809.

38 See 65(66).9.4 on the inclusion of the anecdote that the young Domitian impaled flies on a stylus: τοῦτο γὰρ εἰ καὶ ἀνάξιον τοῦ τῆς ἱστορίας ὄγκου ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ὅτι γε ἱκανῶς τὸν τρόπον αὐτοῦ ἐνδείκνυται, ἀναγκαίως ἔγραψα, καὶ μάλισθ' ὅτι καὶ μοναρχήσας ὁμοίως αὐτὸ ἐποίει ("Unworthy as this incident is of the dignity of history, yet, because it shows his character so well and particularly because he still continued the practice after he became emperor, I have felt obliged to record it.")

39 Schmidt (Schmidt 2000, 21; 32) studies the numerous anecdotes in Dio's contemporary

tions, often at the beginning and end of an emperor's reign, with anecdotes and instances of behaviour that support direct characterizations, character depiction is always circular to a certain degree. The depiction of character is based on the interpretation of a person's actions, while single actions in their turn are explained by character depiction.[40]

The character of Dio's figures is rather fixed. However, a character can develop, i.e. character traits can be suppressed for a while and break through later. Dio's Caligula, for example, undergoes a clear development for the worse (τῷ δ' αὐτῷ τούτῳ τρόπῳ καὶ ἐς τἆλλα πάντα ὡς εἰπεῖν ἐχρῆτο, "he went through this same process of deterioration, too, in almost all other respects", 59.3.1). These developments often depend on the surroundings that shape a person's character. Dio attributes responsibility to those who determine an emperor's environment, especially his teachers, in forming his character. Education and upbringing, in particular with regard to moderation, influence a character at least to a certain degree.[41] This becomes most apparent with Commodus. In his characterization at the beginning of Commodus' reign Dio explicitly states that Commodus was not wicked by nature: he is characterized as innocent, simple, cowardly, and ignorant (73[72].1.1).[42] Dio blames his environment, which led him astray and made him lascivious and cruel, habits to which Commodus became accustomed and which he made his second nature.

The depiction of Nero's character and his development follows a similar pattern. The books on his principate start with an elaborate characterization that consists of a general part (61.1–5) and a specific part (61.6).[43] Dio points out that

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history and discusses the influence of contemporary school teaching; sometimes Dio aimed only at entertainment, not at providing information, so Schmidt (Schmidt 2000, 31; 34). I do not consider such a strict distinction as necessary or helpful: entertainment and information can be closely connected, cf. Schulz 2019b.

40 Dio admits implicitly that he is aware of this problem. Dealing with the question of whether Agrippina really seduced Nero he points out that he himself does not know. It might well have been invented, he admits, as it fits her character (ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνο μὲν εἴτ' ἀληθῶς ἐγένετο εἴτε πρὸς τὸν τρόπον αὐτῶν ἐπλάσθη οὐκ οἶδα, 62[61].11.4).

41 Cf. Kuhn-Chen 2002, 243. Underlining the importance of education as a Stoic feature, cf. Gowing 1992, 30–31 on Dio and the Stoa.

42 οὗτος πανοῦργος μὲν οὐκ ἔφυ, ἀλλ' εἰ καί τις ἄλλος ἀνθρώπων ἄκακος, ὑπὸ δὲ δὴ τῆς πολλῆς ἁπλότητος καὶ προσέτι καὶ δειλίας ἐδούλευσε τοῖς συνοῦσι, καὶ ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἀγνοίᾳ τὸ πρῶτον τοῦ κρείττονος ἁμαρτὼν ἐς ἔθος κἀκ τούτου καὶ ἐς φύσιν ἀσελγῆ καὶ μιαιφόνον προήχθη ("this man was not naturally wicked, but, on the contrary, as guileless as any man that ever lived. His great simplicity, however, together with his cowardice, made him the slave of his companions, and it was through them that he at first, out of ignorance, missed the better life and then was led on into lustful and cruel habits, which soon became second nature", 73[72].1.1).

43 Cf. 61.6.1: τοιοῦτος μὲν τὸ σύμπαν ὁ Νέρων ἐγένετο, λέξω δὲ καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον ("Such was Nero's general character. I shall now proceed to details.").

Nero's environment, in particular his teachers Seneca and Burrus, is complicit in his becoming a bad emperor, since their indulgent style of education does not turn out to be successful (e.g. 61.4.2–5).[44] Dio either does not know or at least does not mention the version according to which there was a good beginning to Nero's principate: there is no so-called *Quinquennium Neronis*.[45] For Dio, Nero's principate is bad from the start. All in all Nero's character does not become very complex in Dio, since with this emperor one usually gets what one sees. Furthermore, Dio's Nero conceals his desires less and less.[46] With Dio's Nero, it is always clear how one has to behave to be safe. Those who are close to him, listen to him, and applaud him are honoured. Those who do not applaud him are punished (62[63].15.2).

Things are more complicated with Dio's Domitian, although this emperor does not undergo any development. He is an equally bad emperor from beginning to end. The depiction of his principate also starts with an explicit characterization, which underlines two main character traits: Domitian is bold and quick to anger, and treacherous and secretive (Δομιτιανὸς δὲ ἦν μὲν καὶ θρασὺς καὶ ὀργίλος, ἦν δὲ καὶ ἐπίβουλος καὶ κρυψίνους, 67.1.1). From these traits of character arise both his impulsiveness and his craftiness (ὥστε ἀφ' ἑκατέρων τῶν μὲν τὸ προπετὲς τῶν δὲ τὸ δόλιον ἔχων, 67.1.1). The most important difference from Nero—which is at the same time the most crucial trait of Domitian for Dio's literary portrait—is his capacity for hypocrisy (67.1.3). The narrator can thus draw a contrast between the inner motives and considerations of the protagonist and the events seen from the outside. The discrepancy between these two layers provides arguments for everything that is contended about Domitian, as it does in Tacitus.[47] This technique is not exclusive to Dio's description of Domitian, but nowhere else is it applied as abundantly as with this emperor.

44 Especially Dio's image of Seneca is very negative. He is against tyranny, but teaches a tyrant. He supports the matricide (62[61].12.1), but was intimate with Agrippina (61.10.1). In Plutarch, by contrast, Tigellinus is depicted as the tutor and teacher of the tyrant (τὸν διδάσκαλον καὶ παιδαγωγὸν τῆς τυραννίδος Τιγελλῖνον, Plut. *Galb*. 17.2) who makes Nero worthy of death (ποιήσας ἀξιονθανάτου Νέρωνα, Plut. *Galb*. 17.3).

45 Cf. Gowing 1997, 2565.

46 A first climax in the narrative of Nero's reign is the murder of Britannicus. Afterwards (61.7.5) Nero does not hold back anymore. He lives out all his desires in public without fear of punishment. However, the emperor is still said to have made some attempt at concealment (61.8.1; 61.9.1–2). The narrative becomes more dynamic with the second family murder, the matricide. The important aspect for Dio is that Nero is now no longer criticized by others. Only Thrasea Paetus provides an exception (e.g. 62[61].15.1–4). A third stage in the development is the rise of the praetorian prefect Tigellinus after Burrus' death (62.13.3).

47 See p.119–121 on (*dis-*)*simulatio* in Tacitus.

Not only is there a discrepancy between Domitian's inner thoughts and his real actions, which can go to extremes (πάντα τὰ ἐναντιώτατα ὧν ἐβούλετο σκηπτόμενος, "always pretending just the opposite of what he really desired", 67.2.6; cf. 67.1.3; 67.2.1–2).[48] His character is also torn by inner inconsistencies, which result in contradictory behaviour. This paradox of behaviour is Domitian's worst trait, because it presents a true dilemma to his surroundings. His subjects cannot know how to behave. For example, Dio's Domitian wants people to flatter him, but he is content neither with those who flatter him nor with those who do not.[49]

Dio's Domitian here recalls Dio's Tiberius, whose introductory characterization exhibits many parallels with the last Flavian (57.1.1–6): Tiberius' words indicate the exact opposite of his real purpose (ἐναντιωτάτους τῇ προαιρέσει τοὺς λόγους ποιούμενος, 57.1.1); he regards an enemy just the same as if he were a most intimate companion (57.1.2); he gives people a vast amount of trouble no matter whether they oppose him or agree with him (πάνυ γὰρ πολὺν ὄχλον παρεῖχεν, εἴτε τις ἐναντιοῖτο οἷς ἔλεγεν εἴτε καὶ συναίροιτο, 57.1.5–6). Tiberius' nephew Caligula too is characterized by inconsistencies and contradictions (59.4.1). Caligula hates those who love Tiberius just as he hates those who hate him (59.4.2). We thus find the same aporetic situation as with Domitian: one does not know how to act and speak to Caligula. Successful behaviour does not depend on prudent deliberation but on chance (cf. 59.4.5).[50]

2.2 *Contrasts: An Invitation to Compare*

2.2.1 Direct Comparisons

To bring out an emperor's character more clearly Dio often contrasts it with another figure. This contrast invites the reader to draw a direct comparison,

48 Dio's Pompey already strives to conceal his true intentions and pretends not to desire the very things he really wishes (36.24.6).

49 See 67.4.2: καίτοι καὶ τοῦτο δεινότατον ἔσχεν, ὅτι καὶ κολακεύεσθαι ἤθελε, καὶ ἀμφοτέροις ὁμοίως ἤχθετο καὶ τοῖς θεραπεύουσι καὶ τοῖς μή, τοῖς μὲν ὅτι θωπεύειν τοῖς δὲ ὅτι καταφρονεῖν ἐδόκουν ("Yet Domitian had this worst quality of all, that he desired to be flattered, and was equally displeased with both sorts of men, those who paid court to him and those who did not—with the former because they seemed to be flattering him and with the latter because they seemed to depise him").

50 One case depicted (59.27.6) that escapes this dilemma is Lucius Vitellius' answer to Caligula's question whether he has seen him talking to the moon goddess, as the emperor claimed to have done: denying that one had seen Caligula and the moon goddess conversing would run the risk of calling Caligula a liar, but confirming that one had seen them might be interpreted as hubris. Vitellius manages to escape the dilemma by answering that only the gods were allowed to see themselves.

which usually casts a bad light on the emperor.[51] Dio exhibits a particular interest in confronting Roman emperors with non-Romans. His Nero is mainly contrasted with four figures: Boudicca, queen of the Britons; Corbulo, general in Armenia; Tiridates, king of Armenia; and Vindex, leader of the revolt against Nero.[52] These contrasts produce four different effects, which deconstruct Nero and which I will discuss one by one.

The contrast with Boudicca underlines the ridiculousness of Nero's imperial representation as an artist. As noted above, Nero's behaviour as foreign and unmanly is stressed even more when it is noted by Boudicca, a foreign woman.[53] The figure of Boudicca here largely takes over the narrator Dio's point of view.[54] In her refined speech to the troops she pictures Nero as woman, as empress of the Romans, and as a bad lyre-player (62.6.3; 5).[55] Not only does Boudicca contrast unmanly, servile Romans to manly, free Britons: according to the queen, the Britons need not be afraid of the Romans, as they surpass them anyway (62.3.1–5; 62.5.1–6).[56] The narrator Dio also contrasts Boudicca with his Nero and with the Nero she describes in her speech. As a speaker she is more intelligent than women usually are (62.2.2). She speaks in a rough voice (τὸ φθέγμα τραχὺ εἶχε, 62.2.4), which is untypical of women and contrasts with Nero's slight and indistinct voice (καίτοι καὶ βραχὺ καὶ μέλαν, ὥς γε παραδέδοται, φώνημα ἔχων, 62[61].20.2).

The contrast between Nero and Corbulo illuminates Nero's military deficiencies. Corbulo has the strategic and political competence that Nero lacks. He is portrayed as the ideal Roman commander and as extremely loyal towards his emperor (62.19.1–4; 62.23.5–6).[57] His behaviour reminds the reader clearly of

51 For the Tacitean comparisons of Nero to Corbulo and of Domitian to Agricola see p.63–64.

52 Cf. Gowing 1997, 2584–2585. Galba too is portrayed as contrasting to Nero, especially as he reverses Nero's actions as soon as possible (62[63].14.1–2).

53 Differently from Tacitus, Dio underlines Boudicca's (Amazon-like) foreignness, cf. Adler 2008, 190.

54 Dio's general interest in Britain and the Britons is revealed in a report in his contemporary history (77[76].12.1–5). He states there that the Britons take the most audacious men as their leaders (77[76].12.2) and reports a critical statement by the wife of the Caledonian Argentocoxus about Julia Domna, the wife of Septimius Severus (77[76].16.5). This statement may be interpreted in the spirit of a *Sittenspiegel* or even as criticism of Julia Domna. For this interpretation of the episode, according to which Dio is here criticizing Septimius Severus' wife, cf. Schmidt 2000, 22; Moscovich 2004, 363.

55 Xiphilinus most probably adopted Dio's original speech verbatim, cf. Brunt 1980, 491.

56 Adler 2011, 140–161 (esp. 146–152; cf. 169; 173) deals with Boudicca's speech and compares it to the corresponding speech in Tacitus' *Annals*. See also p.107.

57 Corbulo's potential for power is mentioned already in the books on Claudius, where Dio points out that Claudius called him back from Germany to prevent him from becoming

the role that the emperor should actually play and which Nero disregards. Tiridates, portrayed as at the height of his reputation due to his age, beauty, family, and intelligence (62[63].2.1), figures as the opposite sort of political leader compared to Nero. Vindex, finally, combines some of these contrasts, being on the one hand a foreigner descended from Gallic royalty, on the other hand a Roman senator:[58] he is depicted as a powerful, intelligent leader of the Gauls, skilled in warfare and passionate for freedom (63.22.1^2).[59]

The narrative of Domitian is dominated by the contrasts with his father and brother as well as with Decebalus, king of the Dacians. Dio's rhetorical technique regarding the first contrast is simple: Vespasian and Titus were good emperors,[60] Domitian was a bad one; this is why Domitian has to be distinguished from his family predecessors. The opposition of Domitian to Vespasian and Titus is a central motif especially at the beginning of his reign:[61] Domitian is said to have brought disgrace and ruin upon the friends of his father and brother, to have attempted to insult Titus' memory, and to have abolished the horse-race that had been held on the birthday of Titus (67.2.1–7). Throughout the depiction of the reign, the contrast persists. The emperor's behaviour towards Mettius Pompusianus, for example, is used to compare Domitian, under whom he dies, to Vespasian, who had not harmed him (67.12.3–4).

even more powerful (61[60].30.4–5). On Corbulo in Cassius Dio cf. Townend 1961, 234–237 (with a focus on Dio's potential sources).

58 Cf. Gowing 1997, 2584–2586.

59 For Vindex adopting Dio's own perspective see p.213–214 on embedded focalization.

60 Dio's positive evaluation of Vespasian is in accord with his critique of Helvidius Priscus: Vespasian is defended against Helvidius Priscus (65[66].12.1; 2–3). Titus is considered a good emperor, but his reign was very short (66.18.4–5). This limitation on appreciation of Titus may be motivated by experience of rulers who behaved differently at the beginning of their reign from the later, more secure periods of their reign. Dio may be reacting with his comparison of Augustus (and his long reign) and Titus (and his short reign) to the idea that Titus was the ideal ruler, a discourse that is apparent in Suetonius (*Tit.* 1).

61 The contrast is developed already before the depiction of his reign, when Domitian is pictured as afraid of his father because of what he had done and had intended to do (ὁ δὲ Δομιτιανός, ἐξ ὧν ἔδρασε καὶ πολλῷ μᾶλλον ἐξ ὧν ἐπεχείρησεν … φοβηθεὶς τὸν πατέρα, 65[66].3.4). Titus, by contrast, participates successfully in the war against the Jews (65[66].4.1). Domitian's activities under his father and brother are hardly developed by Dio, but after the victory of Vitellius he is depicted as in charge of the affairs of state together with Mucianus in Rome, and he gives a speech in front of the soldiers (64[65].22.2; 65[66].2.1). We also learn that Domitian has an affair with Domitia, whom he steals away from her husband and marries (65[66].3.4), and we hear the anecdote about the impaling of flies on a stylus (65[66].9.4). Furthermore, Domitian is said to have hastened Titus' death (66.26.2).

More complex is the contrast created between Dio's Domitian and Decebalus. These two characters can be said to form two points of a triangle, the third point of which is not visible: that third character is Trajan, who also led a war against Decebalus. Trajan's war against Decebalus appears the more praiseworthy if Domitian's war against Decebalus is depicted as unsuccessful. Dio's description of this war appears indeed to be influenced by Trajanic propaganda, or at least to be in accord with it.[62] The figure of Decebalus thus provides a direct link between Domitian and Trajan and is a tool for comparing Trajan's success to Domitian's failure. To support this comparison, Dio's Decebalus enters the scene as king of the Dacians right at the beginning of the narrative about the Danubic wars (μέγιστος δὲ δὴ πόλεμος Ῥωμαίοις τότε πρὸς τοὺς Δακοὺς ἐγένετο, ὧν τότε Δεκέβαλος ἐβασίλευε, "at this time the Romans became involved in a very serious war with the Dacians, whose king was then Decebalus", 67.6.1). As far as we know, the historical Decebalus became involved in the events depicted here only later in the year 86 CE. But when Dio introduces Decebalus as shrewd in his understanding of warfare and in the waging of war (δεινὸς μὲν συνεῖναι τὰ πολέμια δεινὸς δὲ καὶ πρᾶξαι, 67.6.1) and as a worthy antagonist of the Romans from the beginning of the campaign (ἀνταγωνιστὴς ἀξιόμαχος, 67.6.1), Domitian can be contrasted to his counterpart from the very start of the depiction. And Dio's Decebalus proves to be superior to Dio's Domitian in the course of the narrative. In the end, Decebalus even dares to ask for unacceptable terms for peace with the Romans (67.6.5), which is why the peace negotiations fail. When the story is picked up later in the Trajan narrative, the contrast between Domitian and Trajan is made explicit through Decebalus' relationship with both Domitian and Trajan and through his focalization of them, a device that we will study more thoroughly below.[63] When Decebalus hears that Trajan is approaching, he becomes frightened, since he knows that on the former occasion he had conquered only Domitian, whereas now he would be fighting both against the Romans and against the emperor Trajan (ἅτε καὶ εὖ εἰδὼς ὅτι πρότερον μὲν οὐ Ῥωμαίους ἀλλὰ Δομιτιανὸν ἐνενικήκει, τότε δὲ ὡς πρός τε Ῥωμαίους καὶ πρὸς Τραϊανὸν αὐτοκράτορα πολεμήσοι, 68.6.2).

Dio applies this technique of contrasting foils throughout his work: most striking are the contrasts between Tiberius and Germanicus, and between Commodus and Marcus Aurelius. For Tiberius the death of Germanicus is depicted as a watershed moment in his principate.[64] While still alive he had

62 Cf. Strobel 1989, whose analysis of Domitian's Danubian wars is the basis for the account of the historical events mentioned in this paragraph.

63 See p.211–215 on embedded focalization.

64 See 57.19.1 and 57.19.8: τὸ μὲν οὖν σύμπαν οὕτω μετὰ τὸν τοῦ Γερμανικοῦ θάνατον μετεβάλετο

provided a positive contrast to Tiberius (cf. 57.18.6–8). It was obviously good for Rome that Tiberius had a rival, since after his death Tiberius' reign takes a turn for the worse. The *caesura* of Germanicus' death is further underlined by the fact that now Sejanus becomes more powerful. Depicted as an important figure in the narrative, Sejanus has a bad character that strongly differs from the good Germanicus.[65] Tiberius supports Sejanus, as he recognizes a character similar to his own (τοῦτον οὖν ὁ Τιβέριος ἐκ τῆς τῶν τρόπων ὁμοιότητος προσλαβών, 57.19.7). The contrast between two figures is even more obvious between Dio's Marcus Aurelius and Commodus. The most striking *caesura* in Dio's depiction of the Roman Empire is when Marcus Aurelius dies and Commodus succeeds him. Dio states that a Golden Age now turns into one of iron and rust (περὶ οὗ ἤδη ῥητέον, ἀπὸ χρυσῆς τε βασιλείας ἐς σιδηρᾶν καὶ κατιωμένην τῶν τε πραγμάτων τοῖς τότε Ῥωμαίοις καὶ ἡμῖν νῦν καταπεσούσης τῆς ἱστορίας, "this matter must be our next topic; for our history now descends from a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust, as affairs did for the Romans of that day", 72[71].36.4). The *caesura* is here recognized on three different levels of the narrative: in the perception of Commodus' contemporaries (τοῖς τότε Ῥωμαίοις), in the perception of Dio's own time (ἡμῖν), and as Dio's topic in his work (περὶ οὗ ἤδη ῥητέον).

As we have just seen with regard to Tiberius and Sejanus, a contrast may be achieved through the comparison with another negative figure too. This is not a comparison of good and bad, but of different degrees of badness. Dio suggests a comparison of Nero and Helius, who is in charge of the affairs of state in Rome during Nero's absence in Greece. According to Dio it is difficult to decide which one was worse, since they behaved entirely alike in most respects. The only difference was that the descendant of Augustus was emulating lyre-players and tragedians, whereas the freedman of Claudius was emulating Caesars (ὅτι ὁ μὲν τοῦ Αὐγούστου ἀπόγονος κιθαρῳδοὺς καὶ τραγῳδούς, ὁ δὲ τοῦ Κλαυδίου ἀπελεύθερος Καίσαρας ἐζήλου, 62[63].12.2). Even Agrippina, a negative character, can provide such a contrast, in her role as educator and admonisher of Nero. Dio's attitude towards her is not at all benevolent. When he chooses Agrippina of all people as a positive foil to Nero (61.4.4; 61.5.4) this makes the criticism of Nero even more effective than if he had compared the emperor only to good characters.

ὥστε αὐτὸν μεγάλως καὶ πρότερον ἐπαινούμενον πολλῷ δὴ τότε μᾶλλον θαυμασθῆναι ("In fine, Tiberius changed so much after the death of Germanicus that, whereas previously he had been highly praised, he now caused even greater amazement").

65 Only an epitomized version of the text of book 57 has come down to us in this passage, but the *caesura* is still remarkable and may have been further developed in Dio's original.

2.2.2 Same Place, Same Time

Dio also indirectly characterizes emperors by describing events that happen at the same place (but at different times), and by events that happen at the same time (but at different places).[66] Just like character contrasts, such remarks on the identity of places or times invite the reader to compare. They make him or her associate events with each other that would not necessarily have to be connected. Dio knows that the assertion that certain events occurred at the same place can be styled as a meaningful sign, as we can see from his report of the death of Narcissus. Narcissus is killed at Messalina's tomb, which Dio ostensibly considers as mere chance, but he adds that it seemed to be in fulfilment of Messalina's vengeance (61[60].34.6). To associate two events with each other, Dio mentions that Nero, after his performance at the *Iuvenalia*, gave a feast on boats at the place where Augustus had once arranged a naval battle (62[61].20.5). This is one of several instances in which the contrast between Nero and Augustus is evoked, this time through identity of place. Dio's Vitellius gets a rope around his neck and is led down from the palace. When Dio adds that this was the place where he had previously revelled (64[65].20.2), this is not a simple naming of the location but also an implicit reason for the rope around his neck and a hint at the inconstancy of fortune. Septimius Severus is mentioned already in the Trajan narrative when Hatra becomes a topic; Dio thereby invites the reader to draw a comparison between these two rulers (68.31.2).[67] And when Dio tells us that Marcus Aurelius lived in Tiberius' house (72[71].35.4) the reader may be relieved for a moment that a good emperor has taken up that place and function now.

That things happen at the same time may suggest that they are connected. Dio's Livia arouses suspicion because Tiberius' return from Rhodes coincides with the death of Augustus' grandsons Lucius and Gaius (55.10a.10). However, the contrast between the simultaneous events may be highlighted too and underline their discrepancy. Describing Nero's reign, Dio achieves a strong contrast when he opposes the events in Rome, Nero's *Iuvenalia* and *Neronia*, which he evaluates as child's play, to the horrible events in Britain taking place at the same time (ἐν ᾧ δὲ ταῦτα ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ ἐπαίζετο, πάθος ἐν τῇ Βρεττανίᾳ δεινὸν συνηνέχθη, 62.1.1).[68] The contrast is supported by the wordplay of ἐπαίζετο,

66 Saïd 2002, 133 discusses the motif of the same location of events as a tragic element in Herodotus (e.g. Hdt. 1.11.5; Soph. *El.* 1495–1496). For the Romans' fascination with events happening on the same day see Feeney 2007, 158–160.

67 For the role of Hatra in the imperial representation of Septimius Severus see p.182.

68 The contrast is highlighted again when, after the depiction of events in Britain, Dio contrasts "Rome" directly (καὶ τὰ μὲν Βρεττανικὰ ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον, ἐν δὲ τῇ Ῥώμῃ ὁ Νέρων …, 62.13.1).

which sounds a little like the expected ἐπράττετο: Nero only "played" instead of "doing" something. Discrepancy can be brought out well in the annalistic structure, which itself invites readers to see events that happen in the same year as being simultaneous. For the year 66 CE, the description of which begins annalistically, Dio mentions two events that are immediately characterized as opposed but taking place in the same year (ἐπὶ δὲ Γαΐου Τελεσίνου καὶ ἐπὶ Σουητωνίου Παυλίνου ὑπάτων εὐδοξότατόν τε ἅμα ἔργον καὶ ἕτερον αἴσχιστον ἐγένετο, "in the consulship of Gaius Telesinus and Suetonius Paulinus one event of great glory and another of deep disgrace took place at the same time", 62[63].1.1). One is evaluated as highly glorious, namely Tiridates' visit to Rome, the other one as disgraceful, namely Nero's performances as singer and charioteer.

2.3 *Focalization*

2.3.1 The Emperor's Motives

To make portraits of his characters more plausible the narrator can also reveal what they think and feel and what motivates their actions. This is a device of narrators in historiography in general, which we have already encountered in our discussion of Tacitus.[69] In a similar way Dio constantly gives insight into the considerations and motivations of his figures. This technique of focalization guides the reader through the text, but it also determines his or her view of specific forms of imperial representation and an emperor's behaviour.[70]

There are several insights into Nero's inner life that shape our negative image of him, such as his emotions depicted after the murder of Agrippina. Dio's Nero seems confused: he cannot believe that the murder has really taken place (although he planned it himself), because the deed seems so monstrous to him that it makes him incredulous; his bad conscience haunts him at night (62[61].14.1–4). This focalization of Nero runs counter to the official version, which was that Agrippina had initiated a conspiracy, which was uncovered, and that she therefore killed herself (62[61].14.3). The description of Nero's thoughts and feelings contradicts this official version and supports the version that Dio has just presented. Dio's Nero himself does not seem to be sure which version he favours: on the one hand, he holds games in Agrippina's honour (62[61].17.2); on the other hand, he celebrates numerous sacrifices for his, as he said, preservation (62[61].18.3). Throughout his life, Dio's Nero feels guilty about the

69 See p.109–114.

70 Cf. Pelling 2009a, 515–519 on the technique of focalization with the example of the depiction of Julius Caesar. For the application of the term "focalization" to characters in historiographical narratives cf. Pelling 2009a, 509 n. 5. The alternative term as used e.g. by Rood 1998, is "gaze".

matricide. This is at least implied when during his tour in Greece he stays away from Athens because of the tale of the Furies, who hunt down those who have committed matricide (διὰ τὸν περὶ τῶν Ἐρινύων λόγον, 62[63].14.3). On his flight shortly before his death, guilt and repentance over the murders that he committed are still on Nero's mind (63.28.4–5).

In these cases, the focalization of Nero supports the impression of a negative deed presented in the narrative. But focalizing the emperor's reflections, motivations, and intentions is particularly effective when they oppose and thereby deconstruct an imperial action presented as neutral or even positive on the surface of the narrative. When Dio's Nero withdraws the soldiers from the gatherings of the people, he claims to be doing so because they are supposed to fulfil military duties only. But the narrator gives a different reason for Nero's action, which contradicts the official, positive one: Nero's real purpose was to give as much freedom as possible to those causing disturbances (τὸ δ' ἀληθὲς ἵν' ὅτι πλείστη τοῖς τι βουλομένοις ταράσσειν ἐξουσία εἴη, 61.8.3). That Dio's Nero does not act against the accusations of people who contend that he killed Agrippina could also be used as a point in his favour. But Dio deconstructs such a positive interpretation: the real reason for Nero was that he did not want to support the rumour, or else that he felt contempt for anything people said (62[61].16.3).

The depiction of Domitian's reign starts with the same technique. Dio narrates something potentially positive for the emperor: Domitian issues a proclamation that an emperor who fails to punish informers is himself creating informers (67.1.4). But the reason for Domitian's proclamation, as previously stated, has already framed it in a negative way: by punishing informers Dio's Domitian only wants to conceal his own share in their wrongdoings (67.1.4).

The technique of focalization is particularly important for the portrayal of Domitian, who is depicted as extremely skilled at simulation. At the same time, his historical imperial representation was less suitable for deconstruction through associations with, for example, femininity or foreignness, as we have seen both in Tacitus and in Dio.[71] This explains why the analysis of inner thoughts and motives by means of focalization is a suitable device for Domitian's deconstruction. It is worth studying one passage in more detail in order to distinguish between what the text establishes as 'facts' and what the text constructs as their alleged motivation. The passage under consideration deals with Domitian's distance from his brother and father (67.2.1–7). I will first paraphrase it, underlining the contrasts between facts and motives.

71 See p.104–105; 188.

Dio starts by contending that Domitian outdid himself in ruining the friends of his father and brother. The epitomized text does not give any evidence for this contention. We are rather surprised to read next that Domitian approved all the donations that were ever made by his brother, his father, or other emperors, which is a potentially positive act (67.2.1). However, Domitian's seemingly positive gesture is deconstructed right away: Dio claims that this was a mere vain show (ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μὲν καλλώπισμα ἄλλως ἦν), that Domitian hated the friends of his family predecessors and considered them his enemies (67.2.2). Next we hear that Domitian instituted a ban on castration. He did so in spite of the fact that he himself entertained a passion for the eunuch Earinus.[72] The ban on castration could therefore potentially be coded as an act of regarding the general interest as more important than personal preferences. Or it could also be interpreted as an act of hypocrisy: Domitian prohibits things from which he himself profits. Dio, however, decides for a third option: the explanation he presents for Domitian's ban on castration turns it into something even more negative and connects it to his brother Titus. According to Dio, the real reason for Domitian's prohibition was Titus' great fondness of eunuchs. With his ban on castration Dio's Domitian wants to insult Titus' memory (ἐπὶ ἐκείνου ὕβρει) (67.2.3).

Next in Dio comes Domitian's statement that emperors who do not punish many people are not good emperors, but only fortunate ones. Dio does not comment on this statement which cannot be regarded as completely wrong. In its critical context however one is inclined to interpret it in a negative way (67.2.3). The following reproach is directed against something that Domitian did not do: he did not care about the praise for Titus' not killing a single senator,[73] and he ignored the wish of the senate to pass decrees that the emperor must not have any senator put to death. Dio goes on to explain the importance of Domitian's disregarding the senators. He tells us that it made a great difference to the senators whether they were involved in the condemnation of

72 This Earinus mentioned by Dio is praised in Domitian's contemporary poetry, where his praise is used to exalt Domitian. See the poems on Earinus in Martial's book 9 and Stat. *Silv.* 3.4 with Hardie 1983, 121–124; Newlands 2002, 88–118; Lorenz 2002, 194; Leberl 2004, 229–241; Cordes 2017, 137; 225.

73 Dio's Nerva makes the promise under oath (68.2.3), similarly to Trajan (68.5.2) and Hadrian (69.2.4). Marcus Aurelius surpasses the promise in a positive way: he implements the rule, against the wishes of the senate, that no supporter of Cassius shall be killed (72[71].30.1–2). Cf. also Pertinax, who is depicted as a very civil *princeps* (74[73].8.5; cf. 74[73].3.4; 5.1). Septimius Severus makes this promise too, but he does not fulfil it (75[74].2.1–2), as mentioned above.

a senator or not (67.2.4).[74] The following contention, that Domitian knew that the senators praised Titus in secret, is again not supported in the preserved text (67.2.5). We hear next that Domitian showed his sorrow over Titus' death openly and that he showed tears while delivering his eulogy. Furthermore, the emperor deifies Titus. All these imperial actions are deconstructed by giving us an insight into Domitian's mind. According to Dio, the emperor's sorrow was only simulated. Domitian is said to have pretended the exact opposite of what he really wanted (πάντα τὰ ἐναντιώτατα ὧν ἐβούλετο σκηπτόμενος, 67.2.6). Dio aims to make Domitian's hatred of his brother Titus seem plausible by stating that Domitian abolished the horse race that was held on Titus' birthday (67.2.6).[75] At the end of the passage Dio emphasizes the consequences that arise from Domitian's insincerity and the discrepancy between his thoughts and feelings on the one hand and his very different actions on the other hand: the people were not safe no matter whether they shared in his grief or in his joy (καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι οὔθ' ὅπως συνάχθοιντο οὔθ' ὅπως συνήδοιντο ἀσφαλῶς εἶχον, 67.2.7).

A summary of Domitian's actions as presented in this passage is hard to produce because Domitian's deeds are not connected with each other in the narrative and are not presented as the main components of this passage. The recurrent theme is rather Domitian's motivations for what he does, his hidden feelings which Dio's focalization seems to expose. It is this motivation that connects the events mentioned, most likely not only in the epitomized version of the text that has come down to us, but in the original too. When we consider the passage as a whole, Dio does not give much exact evidence for his contentions. In fact, when we look at the surface of events described we find several positive deeds: Dio's Domitian approves the gifts granted by his father and brother, he forbids castration, he asserts that an emperor is lucky who does not have to punish many people, he openly mourns Titus' death, and he deifies his brother. The only facts presented that oppose this positive image of Domitian are that he does not generally promise not to kill any senator and that he abolishes the horse race on Titus' birthday. Presented like this, the facts would achieve a very different effect. But the constant focus on Domitian's alleged true motivation overshadows the facts and makes the negative layer of Domitian's thought and feelings instead emerge most clearly.

74 When Dio adds that the senators could not oppose the emperor anyway, he slightly contradicts himself: he has just mentioned one of the senators' endeavours to increase their own power. Cf. Murison 1999, 212.

75 Cf. the request to abolish the horse race on Caracalla's birthday after his death in 79 (78).18.1.

2.3.2 Embedded Focalization

The narrator not only presents the emperor's motivation and focalizes his figure; he also depicts the events from the perspective of another character. Narratology terms this device, by which the narrator shows what a character sees, feels, and thinks, 'embedded focalization'. Embedded focalization can be accompanied by speech, so that a character is not only a focalizer but also a secondary narrator-focalizer. In our analysis of Tacitus, we have already seen such instances, in which the perception of the events is directed through the eyes (and words) of a character.[76] Dio makes abundant use of this device and employs various kinds of focalizers with different relationships with the emperor to deconstruct imperial representation and behaviour.

Focalizers may be close relatives of the emperor, which implies that their view of the emperor is based on intimate acquaintance and hence is plausible. For example, the reader sees that Tiberius chooses Caligula as his successor through Tiberius' focalization. Tiberius is said to have appointed his nephew Caligula because he knew that Caligula's misdeeds would be even worse than his own (58.23.3–4). In this way, Tiberius' focalization of Caligula disqualifies both emperors at once. Dio's Nero is discredited through the focalization of his parents, who exhibit their son's bad character. His biological father Domitius is said to have recognized Nero's depravity and licentiousness because he was familiar with his own and Agrippina's character, and to have stated that no good man could possibly be sprung from these parents.[77] As this statement discredits both the person who utters it and his closest kin, it creates the impression of being trustworthy. Agrippina too assesses Nero's reputation rightly. Dio has her kill the commendable governor of Asia, Silanus, in order to prevent him from being preferred to Nero for his manner of life (ἵνα μὴ καὶ τοῦ Νέρωνος οὕτω ζῶντος προκριθείη, 61.6.5). At the important turning point when Titus' emperorship is passed on to Domitian, Dio's dying Titus mentions two of his mistakes. He does not make them explicit, but Dio is sure that one of these mistakes was that Titus did not kill Domitian (66.26.4). Among the contemporary emperors, Commodus' obtuseness is recognized by his mother Faustina, who is for this

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76 See p.121–123.

77 See 61.2.3: καίτοι καὶ τὴν πονηρίαν καὶ τὴν ἀσέλγειαν τὴν τοῦ Νέρωνος καὶ ὁ Δομίτιος ὁ πατὴρ ἱκανῶς, οὐκ ἐκ μαντείας ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν τρόπων τῶν τε ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν τῆς Ἀγριππίνης, προείδετο, καὶ εἶπεν ὅτι "ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν ἄνδρα τινὰ ἀγαθὸν ἔκ τε ἐμοῦ καὶ ἐκ ταύτης γεννηθῆναι" ("Yet Domitius, the father of Nero, foresaw clearly enough his son's future depravity and licentiousness, and this not as the result of any oracle but by his knowledge of his own and Agrippina's character; for he declared: 'It is impossible for any good man to be sprung from me and this woman.'").

reason afraid that the throne might not pass from her husband Marcus Aurelius to her son (72[71].22.3). Dio's Elagabalus is hated by his own grandmother (80[79].19.4).

In the narrative about Nero we frequently see events through the eyes of the people. This is not without significance since Dio in general does not consider the people to be a relevant factor in political power.[78] That he nevertheless presents the people as a focalizer in his narrative has an intriguing effect: we can consider it a strategy to deconstruct the support that Nero supposedly found among this social group.[79] In Dio's account, the people detect that Nero punishes others for misdeeds that he commits himself, and they are amused over this (τοῖς δὲ δὴ ἄλλοις γέλωτα ἰσχυρὸν παρέσχεν, ὅτι τὰ ἑαυτοῦ ἔργα δι' ἑτέρων ἐκόλασεν, 61.7.6). According to Dio, the masses realize that the fact that Nero takes away Agrippina's guards reveals his hatred of her (61.8.4). They hope that the matricide will lead to Nero's end (62[61].15.1), and they revere him only in public (δημοσίᾳ μὲν), not in private (ἰδίᾳ δὲ), where they tear him to shreds (μάλα αὐτὸν ἐσπάραττον) (62[61].16.1). The people want to see Corbulo in Nero's place (62.19.4). Finally, they react happily when Nero is on the run: they offer sacrifices and wear liberty caps (63.29.1).

The focalization of Nero through the contrasting figures of Boudicca, Tiridates, Corbulo, and Vindex is especially effective. We have already discussed the role of Nero in Boudicca's speech, which invites the reader to draw a comparison between the Roman emperor and the British leader:[80] here the narrator Dio clearly intrudes upon his figure's focalization. The figure of Tiridates is used by the narrator to present the events during his visit to Rome (62[63].1.2–6.2) from his perspective. The depiction of this event starts off as positive and successful for Nero. Nero's staging of Tiridates' coronation in a golden setting even makes the people call the day "golden" (ἀφ' οὗ καὶ τὴν ἡμέραν αὐτὴν χρυσῆν ἐπωνόμασαν, 62[63].6.1). But this positive impression is deconstructed soon after by Nero's public performances as singer and charioteer (62[63].6.3), which are presented through Tiridates' focalization. He reacts to Nero's performances by feeling disgust for him, and praises Corbulo (62[63].6.4), which ties in with the

78 Cf. de Blois 1997, 2659; de Blois 1999, 275.

79 Harriet Flower detects a similar function in the pseudo-Senecan *Octavia*, the recipients of which were, unlike Dio's readers, the people themselves ("The *Octavia* dramatizes the need to create a negative picture of Nero and to present that picture to the general public in the city", Flower 2006, 205). For a different way of deconstructing Nero's popularity with the masses in critical discourse see p.70–71 on Tacitus, who depicts Nero and the masses as equally bad.

80 See p.201–205 on direct comparisons.

contrast between Nero and Corbulo constructed by the narrator. The emperor is now shown as not following the advice that Maecenas gives to Octavian in his programmatic speech, namely that the emperor should adorn the city and make it magnificent with festivals, so that brilliance will inspire Rome's allies with respect and its enemies with terror (52.30.1).[81] Instead of awe or terror, Tiridates experiences aversion. The reflections of Corbulo, whose loyalty is also described by the narrator-focalizer and confirmed by Nero's and Tiridates' focalizations, are revealed to the reader at the moment of his death. Dio's Corbulo now realizes for the first time that he has done wrong in saving the "lyre-player" and coming to him unarmed (τότε γὰρ δή, τότε πρῶτον ἐπίστευσεν ὅτι κακῶς ἐπεποιήκει καὶ φεισάμενος τοῦ κιθαρῳδοῦ καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐλθὼν ἄνοπλος, 62[63].17.6). When the character Corbulo here calls Nero a "lyre-player" in his mind, he seems to be picking up the term directly from the suspicion just presented by the narrator, who claimed that Nero had Corbulo killed because he did not want to be seen by him in his dress—the long ungirded tunic—as a lyre-player (κιθαρῳδήσειν γὰρ ἤμελλεν, ὥς τινες λέγουσι, καὶ οὐχ ὑπέμεινεν αὐτῷ τὸ ὀρθοστάδιον ἔχων ὀφθῆναι, 62[63].17.5). The focalizer Corbulo here supports what the narrator-focalizer has just suggested.

The same sort of interplay between the narrator's focalization and embedded focalization characterizes the speech of Vindex. It is from Vindex as focalizer and narrator that we learn the main reasons for the uprising against Nero and the complaints about him (63.22.2–6).[82] From a narratological viewpoint we can see again that Dio blends the voice and view of the primary narrator with the focalizer. Focalization always entails ambivalence to a certain degree.[83] The reader cannot clearly know whether to attribute the view and words of a secondary narrator-focalizer to this character or to the primary narrator-focalizer. The two levels overlap in particular when the character Vindex neatly summarizes the points that the narrator Dio has made about Nero. Vindex mentions Nero's despoiling the world, his destroying the senate, the matricide, his not preserving the semblance of sovereignty, his marriages with

81 Marcus Aurelius too takes the perspective of other people into account: the barbarians ought not to notice internal Roman struggles (λέγων μὴ χρῆναι τοὺς βαρβάρους εἰδέναι τὰ μεταξὺ Ῥωμαίων κινούμενα κακά, 72[71].27.1[a]). For Dio's Seneca and Burrus in 61.3.4 see p.188–189.

82 The members of the Pisonian conspiracy had similarly given the reason that they could no longer endure Nero's disgraceful behaviour, his licentiousness, and his cruelty (62.24.1). Subrius Flavius, a military tribune, says he had hoped that Nero might some day become a good emperor. But he, Subrius, could not be the slave of a charioteer and lyre-player (62.24.2).

83 Cf. de Jong 2014, 52.

Sporus and Pythagoras, his performances in the theatre as lyre-player, singer, herald, and tragic actor in the most disgraceful roles, and his abuse of sacred titles (63.22.3–6). In a sort of *mise-en-abyme* the frame narrative is mirrored in the speech of the secondary narrator Vindex. One is almost under the impression that Vindex has read the *Roman History*.[84] Indeed the speech, which would surely have been less relevant to Vindex' audience of Gauls, is extremely important for Dio's own narrative.[85] Dio's Vindex, to put it differently, does not give the speech for his internal audience, but for Dio's readers, the external audience.

This technique is related to the narratological devices of *metalepsis* and *paralepsis*. *Metalepsis* refers to the overlap of two narrative levels of different hierarchies, for example when an external narrator suddenly meets his own characters.[86] In a strict sense this is not the case in our passage: Dio and Vindex do not meet, but the *mise-en-abyme* effect does make the two hierarchies of narrative overlap. We speak of *paralepsis* when a character in a narrative gives or has more information than he ought to have from a logical viewpoint. The narrator then intrudes upon the focalization of his character and has him tell or see more than his focalization would strictly allow.[87] In a strict sense, again, this is not the case in our passage: Dio's Vindex could in theory indeed know what he says. However, Vindex uses the exact words of the primary narrator, as though he knew them, and he seems to be addressing his primary narrator's audience rather than his own.

The ambivalence of embedded focalization is used to a different effect when the narrator and the embedded focalizer, who normally differ in their attitude, suddenly coincide. The intrusion of the narrator upon his character then makes the character suddenly seem to see himself through the eyes of the narrator and to judge himself not by his own but by the narrator's standards. We have touched upon one example regarding Nero already. When explaining Nero's murder of Corbulo Dio refers the reader to people who said that Nero did not want to be seen by Corbulo in his unmanly dress as a lyre-player (ὥς τινες λέγουσι), and seems to agree with them (62[63].17.5). This explana-

84 Much of the material of Vindex' speech recalls the depiction of Nero's trip to Greece, cf. Edmondson 1992, 237.

85 Cf. Gowing 1997, 2585.

86 For ancient examples see de Jong 2014, 42. Similar to de Jong's example, in which Helen announces the song of which she will be a part, namely the *Iliad* (Hom. *Il.* 6.357–358), Dio's Thrasea announces that men will talk of him after his death (ἐμοῦ μὲν γὰρ πέρι καὶ ἔπειτα λόγος τις ἔσται, 62[61].15.4).

87 Ancient examples of both are provided by de Jong 2014, 53 (for embedded focalization); 60 (for secondary narrators).

tion, however, is totally un-Neronian and sounds more like that of the narrator himself.[88] It does not tie in with his self-conscious representation as artist in other passages. Paradoxically, Nero's behaviour appears especially illogical and inconsistent with himself when his reasons are presented as logical from the point of view of the narrator.[89] Likewise, when Dio's Domitian causes the death of many spectators during a naval battle in the theatre because he forbids them to put on warmer clothes when a rainstorm suddenly arises (67.8.2–3), the feast that follows this event is introduced as a compensation act (ἐφ' ᾧ που παραμυθούμενος αὐτοὺς δεῖπνόν σφισι δημοσίᾳ διὰ πάσης τῆς νυκτὸς παρέσχε, "by way, no doubt, of consoling the people for this, he provided for them at public expense a dinner lasting all night", 67.8.4), as we learn from the emperor's perspective. Domitian's focalization seems to provide proof of Domitian's guilt. Likewise, under Commodus, the brothers Condianus and Maximus raise the suspicion that they are not content with the status quo because their qualifications are so good: a great reputation for learning, military skills, brotherly affection, and wealth (73[72].5.3). The focalizer Commodus is here evaluating them by the criteria of the narrator, not his own.

3 The Rhetoric of Combination

3.1 *Imperial Actions in Disproportion*

The motivation of a figure is relevant not only for character depiction, which we have studied in the previous section. The presentation and discussion of reasons for (imperial) behaviour also offers the narrator the opportunity to style himself as a trustworthy analyst of history. The Dionian narrator claims to expose certain official reasons for imperial behaviour as bogus, for example when Cremutius Cordus' historiographical work is revealed to be a false reason for his downfall (57.24.3–4). Sometimes the official version and Dio's own, true version are explicitly labelled as such, as in the case of Antinous' death: he died either by falling into the Nile, as Hadrian wrote, or, "as the truth is", when he was sacrificed (εἴτ' οὖν ἐς τὸν Νεῖλον ἐκπεσών, ὡς Ἁδριανὸς γράφει, εἴτε καὶ ἱερουργη-

88 We find the same phenomenon when Commodus is described as ashamed of his wish to perform openly as a charioteer, and hence does it only in the obscurity of the night (73[72].17.1).

89 Since even Dio's Nero is convinced of Corbulo's loyalty, the text does not suggest any other reason for the murder. There are no hints at a conspiracy, e.g. with the Sulpicii, in the extant text. For a possible connection with the conspiracy of Annius Vinicianus see Edmondson 1992, 241 with further references.

θείς, ὡς ἡ ἀλήθεια ἔχει, 69.11.2). Similarly, the reason for Marcus Aurelius' death was not illness, as the official version claimed; he rather died—"as I was plainly told"—by the act of his physicians, who wished to do Commodus a favour (οὐχ ὑπὸ τῆς νόσου ἣν καὶ τότε ἐνόσησεν, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ τῶν ἰατρῶν, ὡς ἐγὼ σαφῶς ἤκουσα, τῷ Κομμόδῳ χαριζομένων, 72[71].33.4²).

In analysing and deconstructing the causes and consequences of imperial behaviour the narrator makes use of the relationship between reason and action: actions consequently appear inadequate and disproportionate. I would like to distinguish four different variants of the inadequacy or disproportion of imperial actions and their causes or consequences in Dio. First, the reason that results in an action is often depicted as vain and irrelevant. Second, an action and its price can be out of proportion. Third, imperial actions are evaluated as inadequate when they result in social inversion. Fourth, imperial actions are depicted as disproportionate when they are based on a contradiction between what the emperor does and what he claims are his principles of behaviour.

(1) The first type of disproportion concerns a conflict between an imperial action and its trivial reason; this type pertains most often to the murders that an emperor commits or for which he is responsible: the reasons are presented as bagatelles or as irrelevant. When reasons for murders are given only briefly or without a context that explains them, this is most probably not only the result of the epitomization of our text: we find this strategy also in the account of Caligula, which has been preserved in its original form. Under Caligula a man is charged with *maiestas* and put to death, according to Dio, because he sold hot water. Dio considers this a key incident for all that happened at that time (59.11.6). Another man is killed because he is suspected of watching for a chance to profit from the emperor's illness (59.8.3). It is especially absurd when Dio's Caligula has someone killed because this person was, according to Caligula, waiting for the emperor's death (59.8.1). A similar disproportion characterizes Domitian's reasons for his murders. He has people put to death who lay down flowers and ointments at the place where Paris was said to have been killed (67.3.1). Arulenus Rusticus dies, we are told, because he was a philosopher and because he had called Thrasea holy (ὅτι ἐφιλοσόφει καὶ ὅτι τὸν Θρασέαν ἱερὸν ὠνόμαζε), Herennius Senecio because he did not take up an office after his quaestorship, and because he had written the biography of Helvidius Priscus (ὅτι τε οὐδεμίαν ἀρχὴν ἐν πολλῷ βίῳ μετὰ τὴν ταμιείαν ᾐτήκει καὶ ὅτι τοῦ Πρίσκου τοῦ Ἑλουιδίου τὸν βίον συνέγραψεν) (67.13.2).

Dio's Nero receives a special treatment regarding empty reasons for his imperial actions and murders. His reasons mostly do not concern him in his

role as emperor but rather pertain to his personality.[90] Dio's Nero has noble citizens killed because he suspects that they do not like him (ὑποπτεύων ἄχθεσθαί οἱ καὶ ἐμίσει καὶ διέφθειρε, 61.5.6). His aunt Domitia, whom he is said to have revered like a mother, is poisoned in a hurry because Nero wanted to have her estates in Baiae and Ravenna (62[61].17.1–2). The dancer Paris has to die because Nero wants to learn from him how to dance, but did not have the capacity to do so (ὅτι ὀρχεῖσθαι παρ' αὐτῷ μαθεῖν ἐθελήσας οὐκ ἠδυνήθη, 62[63].18.1). Sulpicius Camerinus and his son are killed because they do not give up their title "Pythicus", which they received from their ancestors. Nero interprets this as a lack of appreciation for his victory at the Pythian games (62[63].18.2). If political reasons for Nero's actions are mentioned, they are presented as fake and as revealing the actual, personal reasons. One example concerns the murders of Thrasea and Soranus, which take place in the context of the punishments after the Pisonian conspiracy. According to Dio, they had to die not because they had been accused—the official and logical cause—but because of the kind of people they were (ἀπέθανον δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ τότε, ὅτι τοιοῦτοι ἦσαν, 62.26.1). In the case of Thrasea's execution one political reason is supplemented by three personal reasons (62.26.3–4). The political reason is thus marginalized because it is mentioned first and then outdone by the other three: Thrasea is put to death because he did not regularly attend the senate meetings, which, according to Nero, showed that he was discontent with its decisions (62.26.3). But, what is more, we also get the personal reasons: Thrasea did not listen to Nero's singing and playing the lyre; he did not sacrifice to Nero's divine voice; and he did not give any public exhibitions (οὔτ' ἤκουσέ ποτε αὐτοῦ κιθαρῳδοῦντος, οὔτε ἔθυσε τῇ ἱερᾷ αὐτοῦ φωνῇ ὥσπερ οἱ ἄλλοι, οὔτε ἐπεδείξατο οὐδέν) although he had performed in a tragedy in his hometown Patavium (62.26.3–4).

(2) The second disproportion is between a form of imperial representation and its costs, or more generally the lack of balance between money and what money achieves.[91] Once more Caesar turns out to be a proto-imperial figure also with regard to finances. Dio comments on Caesar's practice of collecting money on every pretext (42.49.1–2). Dio's Caesar contends that soldiers and money depend on each other, that the two of them create, protect, and

90 But there are also Neronian reasons that are deconstructed in the way I have just described for Dio's Caligula: under Nero someone is slain, according to Dio, for living near the Forum and letting out some shops, or for receiving a few friends in them, another because he possessed a picture of Cassius (62.27.1).

91 For Dio's interest in finances cf. Edmondson 1992, 43, who attributes this interest to his having to deal with finances during his quaestorship and his time as curator of Pergamum and Smyrna. See also France 2016.

strengthen political regimes (42.49.4); he therefore needs to get a lot of money (42.49.4–50.5). In the imperial narrative, Tiberius, Vespasian, and Trajan are praised for economic frugality and modesty, whereas other emperors are criticized for their financial excesses.[92] Dio's Caligula spends money on actors, horses, and gladiators (59.2.5–6). He murders people because they are rich (59.21.4). The praetor Junius Priscus has to die because of his alleged wealth—needlessly, as it turns out, since he possessed nothing (59.18.5).

Dio's Nero funds his expenses by exploitation, dispossessions, and murders. Pallas, for example, is killed because of his great fortune (ὅτι καὶ πλοῦτον πολὺν ἐκέκτητο, 62.14.3). Junius Torquatus, a descendant of Augustus, is supposed to have squandered his fortune in order not to appear too rich (ἐξ ἐπιτηδεύσεως, ὅπως μὴ πάνυ πλουτοίη, 62.27.2). People can purchase their lives from Tigellinus (62.28.4; 62[63].21.2). Testaments that designate Nero as heir are forced: Nero made his victims leave him a set sum of money so that he would not seem to have killed them because of their wealth; the testaments were invalid if they left him less (62[63].11.2). In Dio's text, this practice is augmented twice: first, Nero wants the whole property of the dead and banishes their children; then, he finally has the exiles killed (62[63].11.3). Dio also suggests a close connection between the high costs of Nero's project of the canal across the Isthmus (62[63].16.1–2) and the murders of the Sulpicii Scribonii and Corbulo (ἔς τε οὖν τἆλλα καὶ ἐς ταῦτα χρημάτων πολλῶν δεόμενος, "for this and other purposes he needed great sums of money", 62[63].17.1). That Vitellius spends all his money on food seems almost innocent in direct comparison (64[65].3.2).

Like Nero, Domitian sentences people to a fine or to death not because they really committed a crime, but because he needs their money, as Dio insinuates (67.12.1). The deconstruction of his behaviour is augmented when imperial representation and events that are financed by this kind of money are depicted as meaningless. We hear for example of a spectacle organized by Domitian that was extremely expensive. But the costs do not seem to legitimize the outcome: Dio states that there is nothing worthy of mention except that young women contended in the footrace (67.8.1), which is not a positive comment.[93] It is remarkable that Dio points out that there is nothing to mention, since with other spectacles of the same sort he lists at least briefly the number and kind of animals killed.[94] When describing a spectacle under Titus Dio similarly

92 Cf. Gowing 2016, 128.

93 Cf. the prohibition of women in footraces mentioned in 76(75).16.1.

94 See e.g. 53.27.6; 55.10.7; 59.13.8–9; 68.15.1. Cf. also 55.33.4, reporting an elephant that overcomes a rhinoceros and a formerly distinguished knight as fighter. On earlier games see

contends that there was nothing worthy of mention, but contradicts this contention by a lengthy description of a spectacle in the amphitheatre (66.25.1–6): Dio thus creates a gap only in order to fill it. With regard to Domitian, however, the gap is confirmed. The fact that Dio points out that there is nothing to say about Domitian's spectacle is even more significant when we recall that he pronounced beforehand that he would only report these events if there was anything worth mentioning.[95]

(3) The third type of disproportion concerns imperial acts that lead to social problems. When Dio criticizes imperial events as costly and claims that the emperor collected his money mainly from the aristocracy, we can see that Dio's critique also has a social aspect. The topic of high costs is thus closely connected to the social changes that the behaviour of the emperor brings about. A feast of Dio's Domitian is described as giving pleasure to the people, but bringing ruin to the powerful (ἃ δὴ τοῖς μὲν πολλοῖς ἐν ἡδονῇ, ὡς εἰκός, ἦν, τοῖς δὲ δυνατοῖς ὀλέθρου αἴτια καθίστατο): since Domitian cannot fund his expenditures, he murders many men (οὐ γὰρ ἔχων ὁπόθεν ἀναλώσει, συχνοὺς ἐφόνευε) (67.4.5). The pleasure of the people thus implies ruin to the aristocracy, as they are the ones who have to provide the money.

Dio's Nero causes even more social inversion, for example by his admiration of horses, which he honours as if they were human: horse breeders and charioteers start treating praetors and consuls with great insolence (61.6.2).[96] The magistrates that have to perform on stage at Nero's *Iuvenalia* (probably in a choir) wear a mask because of the shame they feel. When they are forced to take it off, they are exhibited to the people, whom, as Dio points out, they had previously commanded (62[61].19.3). Nero's preference for the people over the aristocracy is pointedly expressed in his alleged joy at Vatinius, who tells him that he hates the emperor because he is of senatorial rank ("μισῶ σε, Καῖσαρ, ὅτι συγκλητικὸς εἶ", 62[63].15.1). The peak of social inversion is achieved in Dio's portrait of the so-called banquet of Tigellinus (62.15.1–6), mentioned above.[97] Not only does Dio describe in detail the breakdown of social rules and hierarchy. The position, too, of the passage within the narrative is significant: it follows the

Pompey in 39.38.1–6 and Octavian's games for the dedication of the temple to Julius Caesar in 51.22.4–9.

95 Cf. the description of battles involving wild animals and gladiators organized by Julius Caesar: Dio there calls it a burden to record their number, which is why he wants to mention other similar events only when it seems essential to mention some particular point (43.22.4).

96 Cf. 61.8.2: people connected with the stage and the horse races no longer respect praetors and consuls.

97 See p.25–26.

depiction of Nero's first performance as a charioteer and precedes the account of the Great Fire of Rome. Likewise, Dio's Nero inverts social orders by favouring the wrong people through the punishments after the Pisonian conspiracy: at this time, faithless friends and house servants flourish (καὶ διὰ τοῦτ᾽ ἐς τὰ μάλιστα οἵ τε φίλοι οἱ πονηροὶ καὶ οἰκέται τινῶν ἤνθησαν, 62.24.4).

(4) A fourth important aspect of the incongruence of motivation and action in bad emperors is that they punish people for things that they themselves have done, or else that they themselves have provided the ground for this punishment. This performative contradiction comes out more strongly in Cassius Dio than in Tacitus, perhaps because Dio seems to consider it an anthropological constant and detects it in general in some people.[98] He finds examples of this contradictory behaviour in the lives of many emperors. Already Augustus' legislation and deeds do not coincide: when talking about marriage relations the senators ironically allude to his own intimacy with many women (54.16.3), among them Terentia, the wife of Maecenas (54.19.3).[99] Tiberius is explicitly said to behave inconsistently (τοῦτό τε οὖν οὐχ ὁμολογούμενον ἔπραξε, 57.15.4). Nero sentences people who forge testaments, although he does it himself (61.7.6). Domitian seduces women and then sentences them for adultery (67.12.1).[100] He has Glabrio perform as gladiator at the *Iuvenalia* and then puts him to death not only for atheism, but also on account of his performance as gladiator, of which he is jealous (67.14.3).

3.2 *Amplifying Actions*

While in the previous examples of deconstruction we saw a disproportionate combination of actions and their circumstances, we will now see that the combination of two actions can also be used to deconstruct imperial representation. In order to make a contention more plausible Dio sometimes uses amplification: he states two or more things about an emperor that are connected to each other. The first one is easier to believe, less scandalous, or more common. The second one amplifies the first, for example because it is more pre-

98 See 36.40.5: πολλῷ γάρ που ῥᾷον ἄλλοις ἐπιτιμῶσί τινες ἢ ἑαυτοῖς παραινοῦσι, καὶ προχειρότατά γε ἐφ᾽ οἷς τιμωρίας ἀξίους τοὺς πέλας εἶναι νομίζουσιν αὐτοὶ ποιοῦσιν, ὥστε μηδεμίαν πίστιν ἐξ ὧν ἑτέροις ἐγκαλοῦσιν, ὅτι καὶ μισοῦσιν αὐτά, λαμβάνειν. "Some persons, of course, can more easily censure others than admonish themselves, and when it comes to their own case do very readily the things for which they think their neighbours deserving of punishment. Hence they cannot, from the mere fact that they accuse others, inspire confidence in their own hatred of the acts in question."

99 This relationship is confirmed from the perspective of Dio's Maecenas (55.7.5).

100 For the same reproach of inconsistency in Juvenal (2.36–42), there concerning Domitian's morals, see Cordes 2017, 300.

cise or provides a new detail. The reader is more inclined to accept the second contention after it has been prepared by the first one. The figure of Octavian is shown making use of this strategy of argument against Marc Antony. He first tells the people things that Marc Antony actually did (50.3.5), so that they then also believe the following rumours (δι' οὖν ταῦτα ἀγανακτήσαντες ἐπίστευσαν ὅτι καὶ τἆλλα τὰ θρυλούμενα ἀληθῆ εἴη, 50.4.1).[101]

The narrator himself applies the same strategy in order to convince the reader. That Nero and Agrippina had intercourse is made plausible by three points that are based on each other (62[61].11.4). Dio points out that he does not know whether the story is true. But by presenting it as the possible result of an amplified chain of events and contentions, the incest[102] seems more plausible than in an isolated statement. It is based, first, on the contention that Nero had a hetaera who resembled Agrippina. This is presented as trustworthy: everyone reported it (62[61].11.4). We learn next that Nero was very fond of this girl because of the resemblance with his mother (ἃ δὲ δὴ πρὸς πάντων ὡμολόγηται λέγω, ὅτι ἑταίραν τινὰ τῇ Ἀγριππίνῃ ὁμοίαν ὁ Νέρων δι' αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἐς τὰ μάλιστα ἠγάπησε, 62[61].11.4). When he toyed with this girl or displayed her charms to others, he said that he was wont to have intercourse with his mother (καὶ αὐτῇ τε ἐκείνῃ προσπαίζων καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐνδεικνύμενος ἔλεγεν ὅτι καὶ τῇ μητρὶ ὁμιλοίη, 62[61].11.4). Nero's words, which have been carefully prepared by the two preceding thoughts, make his wish for the incest and thus the incest itself plausible.

We find a similar instance of amplification in the case of Dio's Domitian (67.12.5): he is said to have personally visited and supported people who prepared accusations or statements of guilt. This is in accord with Dio's picture of Domitian; it is plausible in the context of the narrative. But Dio then adds that Domitian also conversed with prisoners in person. The statement is made more plausible by the personal contact of Domitian mentioned in the previous statement. Finally Dio amplifies his contention when he adds that Domitian held the chains of the prisoners in his hands, a sign of his desire for control.[103]

101 We find this strategy of amplification in Cleopatra's thoughts as well, here applied to convince not someone else, but herself. Contemplating how to behave towards Octavian after Actium and pondering what she might achieve when she makes him her slave, she amplifies her wishes twice (51.9.6): first she considers pardon, then rule over Egypt, and finally rule over the Roman Empire.

102 Incest of mother and son is not automatically negative: Dio's Caesar dreams of incest with his mother and interprets it as a positive sign of great power or sole rulership (37.52.2; 41.24.2).

103 Cf. Murison 1999, 253.

3.3 *Persuasive Order*

Besides the combination of actions and their circumstances, and the amplification of actions, there is a third form of combination that supports deconstruction. This is the relationship of time and events constructed by the narrator. An important trait of every historiographical narrative is the relationship between the chronology of events as they (are imagined to have) happened, i.e. the plot, and the temporal presentation in the text, i.e. the story. Annalistic historiography mirrors the natural chronology of events in the text at least on a structural level, by using the year as the narrative unit for events. The events are to be embedded in a chronological pattern.[104] For Dio, the annalistic scheme fulfils not only a dispositional function but also a social one. In a passage in which he comments in general on this way of presenting historical material, he points out that giving one's name to the years is in his own times a privilege of the consuls who are in office at the beginning of the year. He himself makes use of the pattern in order to secure perfect clarity with regard to the succession of events (πρὸς δὲ δὴ τὴν τῶν ἀεὶ πραττομένων δήλωσιν, 43.46.6). But there are moments when Dio breaks with the annalistic scheme and the chronological order. For this reason, Eduard Schwartz complained about the lack of clarity in the temporal order, the tearing apart of synchronisms, and incorrect pragmatic connections.[105] But it is more valuable to ask why Dio chooses to depart from chronological order.[106]

Let us first look at a passage that does not present events in their chronological order. When Dio describes how Domitian dealt with his wife Domitia and his niece Julia (67.3.1–2),[107] the story clearly differs from the plot, as the events are not narrated in their chronological order. Dio's story starts with Domitian's plan to have his wife sentenced to death for adultery (τὴν δὲ γυναῖκα τὴν Δομιτίαν ἐβουλεύσατο μὲν σφάξαι ἐπὶ μοιχείᾳ, 67.3.1). Ursus is able to prevent him from doing so, and Domitian only divorces Domitia (παρακληθεὶς δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ Οὔρσου ἀπεπέμψατο, 67.3.1). Beforehand, however, he had the actor Paris openly killed because of her (τὸν Πάριν τὸν ὀρχηστὴν ἐν μέσῃ τῇ ὁδῷ δι' αὐτὴν φονεύσας, 67.3.1). This last piece of information is the most negative one. Chronologically it would have to be put somewhere in the middle of the story. But as conclusion it is more effective. The murder of Paris is given further emphasis when

104 Cf. p.206–207 on events that happen at the same time.

105 Cf. Schwartz 1899/1957, 400.

106 Cf. Rood 1998, 22 referring to his narratological analysis of Thucydides: "we should be interested in the function, not the date, of anachronies".

107 Murison 1999, 213–215 discusses all the logical flaws in the stories about Domitian and Julia.

Dio depicts how people revere the spot where he was killed (67.3.1), a passage mentioned already. The order of the narrative is probably Dio's own, since, as was pointed out above, Xiphilinus usually does not change the order of events.

Dio goes on to establish another temporal connection: afterwards (κἀκ τούτου, 67.3.2) Domitian lived with his niece Julia as husband and wife, and he did not conceal it. As with the Tacitean Nero and his divorce from Octavia in favour of Poppaea, the temporal connection here suggests a logical connection too.[108] The link between the two pieces of information 'Domitian divorced Domitia' and 'Domitian then lived with his niece Julia' makes the second action appear to be the motivation for the first. It is supplemented by the contention that this relationship went on even after Domitian reconciled with Domitia following an initiative of the people (67.3.2).

We also find many examples of this technique where the (chronologically correct) order of events depicted seems to suggest a logical link. For instance, Dio makes the murder of Burrus plausible by constructing a logical chain of events from Nero's divorce from Octavia to this murder (62.13.1–3): Dio's Nero divorces Octavia and, urged by Poppaea, has her killed (62.13.1). Dio's Burrus is against these actions of Nero (καίτοι τοῦ Βούρρου ἐναντιουμένου αὐτῷ); he harshly criticizes Nero in his characteristically frank speech (62.13.2). Consequently, Nero has him killed by poison (62.13.3).

The order of single elements of the narrative creates coherence and makes it appear more plausible. A passage that illustrates this is the depiction of the Great Fire of Rome under Nero (62.16.1–18.5). In the narrative, Dio presents the fire after the banquet of Tigellinus,[109] which is the peak of social inversion and immorality, and before the war in Armenia, which takes place at the same time and produces a strong contrast. The narrative of the fire first mentions that Nero had for a long time wished to see, like Priam, his own city destroyed (τὸν γοῦν Πρίαμον καὶ αὐτὸς θαυμαστῶς ἐμακάριζεν ὅτι καὶ τὴν πατρίδα ἅμα καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀπολομένας εἶδεν, 62.16.1).[110] Emphasizing this desire already suggests that Nero was the initiator of the fire. There is no doubt about the culprit Nero in Dio. Dio shows how Nero puts his desire, stated emphatically at the beginning of the account, into practice and has his city burned (62.16.1–2). He adds a lively depiction of the fire (62.16.3–7), which has to be started afresh by Nero's soldiers (62.17.1–3). The people compare it to the attack of the Gauls (62.17.3). The narrative reaches its peak with Nero's famous performance as lyre-player singing

108 For Nero in Tacitus see p.109–110.

109 Tacitus, by comparison, puts the marriage to Pythagoras between the banquet of Tigellinus and the fire. See p.125–126.

110 Cf. the similar desire of Tiberius in 58.23.4.

of the fall of Troy, "as he says", although to the spectators it was the fall of Rome (τὴν σκευὴν τὴν κιθαρῳδικὴν λαβὼν ᾖσεν ἅλωσιν, ὡς μὲν αὐτὸς ἔλεγεν, Ἰλίου, ὡς δὲ ἑωρᾶτο, Ῥώμης, 62.18.1). Dio's Nero performs his song on the roof of the palace, from which there was the best general view (ὁ Νέρων ἔς τε τὸ ἄκρον τοῦ παλατίου, ὅθεν μάλιστα σύνοπτα τὰ πολλὰ τῶν καιομένων ἦν, ἀνῆλθε, 62.18.1). Dio here comes full circle: he connects Priam's view and Nero's view, the fall of Troy and the fall of Rome.

3.4 *Cassius Dio's Rubrics*

In many cases we can characterize Dio's narrative order as associative rather than chronological.[111] Pieces of information are taken out of their temporal context, fragmented, and then put into a new context by associating them with other pieces of information. In doing so Dio sometimes recalls Suetonius in his technique of presentation and his rubrics.[112] Dio comments on his choice of this technique explicitly when he lists the legions of Augustus. First, he mentions those legions that have existed from the time of Augustus until his own days. He then adds that he will speak of the other legions that still exist in his own time too and mention their enlistment by the emperors after Augustus. His purpose in doing so is that someone who is interested in this sort of information will find it more convenient if all the facts are collected in a single portion of his book (ἵν' ἐνὶ χωρίῳ πάντα γεγραμμένα ῥᾳδίως τὸν βουλόμενόν τι περὶ αὐτῶν μαθεῖν διδάσκῃ, 55.24.1). According to Dio, then, a thematic rubric that breaks up the chronological order and the annalistic scheme is helpful for the reader, as it allows him easier access to a certain topic.

Dio offers several kinds of rubrics in his *Roman History*. For example, after reporting Livia's death he collects remarkable sayings by her (58.2.4–5). Seneca's contradictions, in which his teaching opposes his lifestyle, are gathered together too (61.10.1–6). There is a rubric on Vespasian's daily routine (65[66].10.4–12.1) and on Hadrian's character (ταῦτα περί γε τοῦ τρόπου, ὡς ἐν κεφαλαίῳ εἰπεῖν, προείρηκα, 69.8.1[1]). Similarly there is a rubric on Caracalla's

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111 Cf. Lintott 1997, 2505 (referring to the Republican books) about the technique of association that determines the structure and order of the events reported.

112 Cf. Pelling 1997, 132: "there are many passages where we can see Dio overriding chronology to group together material in a suggestive way". Dio also recalls Suetonius when one and the same element of representation can be both positive and negative, depending on the perspective from which it is viewed (see p.329–334 on Suetonius). Vitellius' banquets, for example, are positive, since he communicates in a friendly way with the most influential people (64[65].7.1); but they are also criticized because they are too expensive (64[65].3.2; 7.3). Freyburger-Galland 2009 argues that Cassius Dio read Suetonius' work, not only but including the *Caesares*.

character and on his behaviour in war (τὸ μὲν οὖν σύμπαν τοιοῦτος ἦν. ἐν δὲ τοῖς πολέμοις ὁποῖος, ἐροῦμεν, 78[77].12.1) and on Elagabalus' violations of inherited customs (80[79].8.1). This shows that Dio thinks of and presents actions of emperors not only in their chronological context, but also in the context of similar actions.

This has a strong rhetorical effect, as we realize by looking at the rubric of Domitian's banquets (67.8.4–9.6).[113] Dio does not explicitly speak of a rubric-theme here, but the events that he mentions are clearly connected on a thematic level. We have discussed the single events of this rubric before, but we may now focus on how they are combined in an effective way in the text: the first banquet held for the people is described as an act of compensation for the deaths that Domitian caused during a naval battle (67.8.4). This is possibly the same banquet as the one mentioned before in 67.4.4.[114] If so, it only serves a structural function here: at this point in the narrative it provides a transition to the notorious funeral banquet that Domitian organized for senators and knights (67.9.1–6). The connection is made only by association (τότε … αὖθις, 67.9.1). The second banquet is depicted much more elaborately than the first and varies its content too: here Domitian appears especially cruel. It also supplements the first banquet for the people by including higher ranks, i.e. the knights and the senators. Dio thus employs the rubric of banquets in order to illustrate Domitian's unsocial behaviour towards all social orders. This is highly effective as the events that illustrate his injustice are presented together in one passage.

What is more, rubrics on different topics may be connected with each other: Domitian's feasts as just discussed (67.8.4–9.6) are not only linked among themselves, they are also connected to the preceding passage, a rubric on Domitian's games (67.8.1–4). At the beginning of this rubric, Domitian's games are criticized as too expensive and historically irrelevant (67.8.1). Worthy of mention, however, is that several spectators died during a naval battle because Domitian allowed no one except himself to put on warmer clothes during a heavy rainstorm (67.8.2–3). Domitian's games, as Dio shows, do not bring joy, but death. The following rubric of banquets is, as we have just seen, connected to this train of thought because Dio claims that one dinner had been organized as recompense for the dead in the theatre (67.8.4). When this rubric ends with the funeral banquet, it continues the motif of death and entertainment from the rubric on games.

113 For this rubric see also Schulz 2016, 286–292.

114 See Murison 1999, 239.

4 Selection and Focus

4.1 *Selecting and Presenting the Text*

4.1.1 (Refusing) Catalogues

Like rubrics, catalogues are the result of a process of selection, which the narrator sometimes explains. But we do not find many catalogues (in the strict sense of the word) of bad imperial deeds in Dio apart from the collection of Caligula's acts (59.10.1–8) that met with the censure of everybody (ἐπαίτια δὲ δὴ πρὸς πάντων ὁμοίως τάδε ἐξειργάσατο, 59.10.1). Part of the reason for this lack of catalogues is Dio's own selections. He points out that he selected his materials for the sake of the reader, lest his descriptions become boring.[115] Selection is a standard principle of his composition.[116] A different explanation for the scarcity of catalogues in our text may be the reductions undertaken by the epitomators. Xiphilinus remarks himself that he shortened Dio's catalogue of Caracalla's victims: ὁ μὲν γὰρ Δίων, ἅτε γνωριμωτάτων κατ' ἐκείνους τοὺς καιροὺς τῶν πεφονευμένων ὄντων, καὶ ἐξ ὀνόματος αὐτῶν ποιεῖται κατάλογον· ἐμοὶ δ' εἰπεῖν ἐξαρκεῖ ὅτι πάντας ὁμοίως οὓς ἤθελε κατεχειρίζετο ("Dio, because the slain were very well known in those days, gives a list of their names; but for me it suffices to say that he made away with all the men he wished without distinction", 78[77].6.1). He has obviously shortened a catalogue of Domitian's victims too.[117]

A motif that we find quite often is what could be called the 'refusal to give a catalogue'. It can help to deconstruct the image of an emperor. Dio refuses to present a catalogue when he claims to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of sacrifices and thanksgivings that the senate decreed for Nero during his tour in Greece (τὰ δὲ δὴ τῆς γερουσίας ἔργον καθ' ἕκαστον ἐπεξελθεῖν, 62[63].18.3). He claims that no one could ever enumerate the possessions that Nero confiscated or the votive offerings that he stole from the temples in Rome (οὐδὲ ἐξαριθμήσειεν ἄν τις, 62[63].11.3). Similarly, after the revolt of Saturninus under Domitian the narrator claims it would be impossible to find out the true number of those killed by Domitian (οὐδ' ἂν εἴποι τις ὅσους ἀπέκτεινεν, 67.11.2). Dio also refrains from offering a catalogue of Commodus' victims, again because he does not wish to produce a tedious narrative (73[72].7.3). Such a refusal can be expressed in the form of a *praeteritio*, for example when Dio asks (62.27.4): "Why should one enumerate the sums given to the Praetorians on the occasion of the Pisonian conspiracy or the excessive honours voted to Nero and his

115 Cf. Hidber 2004, 194–195 with reference to 42.19.3–4 and 53.21.2.

116 Cf. Millar 1964, 32–33; Reinhold 1986, 9–11; Kuhn-Chen 2002, 18–19; 133.

117 See Murison 1999, 218–219 on 67.3.3[1], a passage that contains very general statements, apparently produced by Xiphilinus.

friends?" (τί δ' ἄν τις καταλέγοι ὅσα ἐπὶ τῇ ἐπιβουλῇ ταύτῃ ἢ τοῖς δορυφόροις ἐδόθη ἢ τῷ τε Νέρωνι καὶ τοῖς αὐτοῦ φίλοις ὑπέρογκα ἐψηφίσθη;). The rhetorical figure suggests of course that Dio would be able to present an extensive catalogue. A note on the omission of a catalogue can have the same effect as the catalogue itself: both the catalogue and the refusal to offer one evoke a great number of individual negative cases.

4.1.2 Catalogues and Individual Cases

Despite their scarcity, catalogues fulfil an important function in Dio's narrative. Individual cases that are mentioned can suggest that a whole catalogue could be given. We can distinguish two kinds of relationships between catalogue and individual cases in Cassius Dio that deconstruct imperial deeds.

First, a negative deed can be presented as one element that has been selected from a potential catalogue of similarly negative deeds. In this case, the catalogue is not completely suppressed, but represented by only one of its elements. During the revolt of Vindex Dio mentions Nero's water organ, which he presents to the senators in the middle of a major political disturbance. Dio presents it as one of Nero's many jokes, the rest of which he will omit (συχνὰ δὲ δὴ καὶ ἤθυρεν, ὧν ἐγὼ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα παραλείψω, ἓν δὲ εἴπω, 63.26.4). Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio are presented as two examples of a potential catalogue of people whom Domitian put to death because they were philosophers (67.13.3).[118] When Dio claims that Domitian had "not a few" men (οὐκ ὀλίγους) put to death whose horoscope let them hope to attain power (67.15.6), he hints at a potential catalogue which is not given. In this case, such a catalogue may not have existed: Dio could be generalizing from Domitian's treatment of Mettius Pompusianus (67.12.2–3).[119]

The selection of only one or a few examples from a (suppressed) catalogue can be accompanied by a clear expression by the narrator that he is breaking off his list.[120] The announcement that a number of instances will be omitted may be made at the beginning or at the end of the list. Dio justifies his breaking off a list by stating that he only wants to recount what he considers especially memorable or useful for his historiography: this is what he does when mentioning the victims of Caligula (τῶν δὲ ἄλλων τοὺς μὲν πολλοὺς οὐδὲν δέομαι ὀνομαστὶ καταλέγειν, "as for the others who perished, there is no need of my naming most of them", 59.22.5). Dio often makes use of this technique in his portrayal of Nero's

118 This is a gross exaggeration. There were probably seven people condemned, three of them to death: the two just mentioned and Helvidius Priscus. See Murison 1999, 256.
119 This is suggested by Murison 1999, 266.
120 Cf. Hose's concept of 'Abbruchsformel' (see Hose 2011, 116).

reign. He even starts it, if the epitomator is following the beginning of the original text, with a clear breaking off of a list. After recounting Claudius' death and the destruction of his testament by Nero, and the murder of Britannicus and his sisters, Dio asks why one should lament the misfortunes of the other victims (61.1.2). In the narrative about the Pisonian conspiracy Seneca is singled out as an example. Dio remarks that it would be a laborious task to talk of all the others who died then (62.25.1). Corbulo and the Sulpicii Scribonii too are pointed out as Nero's victims and feature at the beginning of a number of examples that Dio declines to mention (ὧν ἐγὼ τοὺς μὲν ἄλλους ἐάσω, "of most of these I shall omit any account", 62[63].17.2).

A second kind of relationship between catalogue and individual cases is that a good deed of an emperor who is otherwise known for his bad deeds can be underlined strikingly. By this focus on one good deed the reader is led to think simultaneously of a whole catalogue of bad deeds, which does not have to be made explicit. Dio's praise of Commodus, that he occasionally performed an act of public service, is only a praise at first sight (73[72].7.4): the scarcity of the praiseworthy action immediately reminds us of all the bad deeds. This technique—individual cases are singled out as positive in order to make the reader think of many negative ones—is not always as explicit as in this example, in which the praiseworthiness is directly stated. The technique is applied implicitly when Dio underlines Otho's special position. He reports that Otho could even say to Nero, "As truly as you may expect to see me Caesar" (62[61].11.2) and that Nero answered "I will not even see you consul" (62[61].11.2). This individual case, however, only makes clear that everyone else could not use free and humorous speech with the emperor: Dio's Otho is legitimated by his bad nature, which brought him close to Nero.[121]

4.1.3 Fictus Interlocutor

In other passages, the presentation of the text is motivated by a question from a *fictus interlocutor*, a form of textual selection very different from the ones discussed so far. In such cases, Dio seems to be answering a question that a reader might ask.[122] The question itself, however, is not made explicit. So after his report about a man without arms, who could use his feet just like hands,

121 The stressing of the positive exception is not confined to single cases. A number of positive cases can still evoke the opposite negative deeds. When Dio remarks of Septimius Severus that he had many senators put to death, among them those who had been accused in due form, who were able to defend themselves, and were convicted (77[76].7.3), Dio still suggests that the opposite method was the regular procedure.

122 Cf. Lintott 1997, 2508 on Dio's thoughts about what the reader may ask next.

Dio seems to be reacting to the question how this is possible and adds that he does not know how this man did it and that he is only stating what is recorded (54.9.9). Dio also uses this technique with regard to imperial representation. He then answers questions asked by a voice from outside the narrative either directly or indirectly, in order to deconstruct alternative views. For example, Dio states that Domitian drove people to suicide (67.3.4^2). Then he seems to react to a *fictus interlocutor* who challenges Dio's version and asks if these suicides might not have been real suicides. In the following passage, this question is answered: Dio points out that people were supposed to think that the people had died voluntarily and not by force (67.3.4^2). Similarly, Dio states, as we just saw, that the exact number of people killed by Domitian after the revolt of Saturninus must remain unclear (67.11.2–3). From what follows we can imagine a *fictus interlocutor* who critically asks why the relevant sources have not been consulted.[123] Dio answers that for these deaths Domitian blamed himself so severely that he chose to prevent any remembrance of those who were put to death and that he prohibited the entering of their names into the records (67.11.3).

4.2 *Focus on the Imperial Role*

4.2.1 Role and Theatre as Metaphors

Theatre, games, and spectacles were public rituals of interaction between the emperor and the people.[124] Theatre was part of the political world: theatrical performances could be closely connected with the real, political world. In the institution of the Roman theatre, the spheres of fiction and reality were not clearly separated, but could influence each other: words of an actor could be interpreted as his own words and not as those of his character; what was said in the theatre could be understood as a comment on contemporary events.[125] In this setting the emperor's behaviour was scrutinized, since it also revealed the quality of his relationship with the people.[126] Dio makes use of this to evaluate

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123 There are indeed no sources about the involvement of senators in the conspiracy. Perhaps there were no senatorial victims at all. The conspiracy seems to have been confined to the military, cf. Murison 1999, 247.

124 Champlin 2003, 64 stresses the ambiguous role of the audience, who "were not mere spectators, but actors as well, playing themselves".

125 See Cic. *Att.* 39.3 (on the actor Diphilus mocking Pompey the Great) with Edwards 1994, 85; Cic. *Att.* 14.2.1; 14.3.2 (on allusions by actors to the murder of Julius Caesar shortly after it happened) with Woodman 1993, 107–108; Champlin 2003, 95–96.

126 See 59.13.3–4 for a passage in which the theatre figures as the place where the bad relations between the emperor, here Caligula, and his people become apparent.

imperial behaviour.[127] Based on (the emperor's behaviour in) the real theatre, one finds in Dio a widespread metaphor of the world as the emperor's theatre, the emperor playing a role in it, and his subjects as spectators. In Dio, the metaphor is addressed by Maecenas in his programmatic speech to Octavian (καθάπερ γὰρ ἐν ἑνί τινι τῆς ὅλης οἰκουμένης θεάτρῳ ζήσῃ, "for you will live as it were in a theatre in which the spectators are the whole world", 52.34.2). That the emperor plays the role of *princeps* is hence not negative or regarded as hypocrisy. But it is criticized if the emperor does not fulfil his role, either by playing it wrongly or by not playing it at all. These are the reproaches made of Nero and Domitian in Dio. In deconstructing their imperial representation Dio does not deal with all possible topics equally, but rather focuses on certain areas which are particularly suitable for his criticism that Nero and Domitian did not live up to their role as *princeps*: as in Tacitus, the focus is on Nero's representation as artist and on Domitian's representation as military autocrat.[128]

4.2.2 Nero as Performer

The historical Nero's representation as artist and performer lends itself very well to deconstruction through references to role playing, as we have already seen in Tacitus.[129] We will now focus on Dio's literary techniques that deconstruct this role.[130] Dio presents Nero as an emperor who makes his political role and his artistic role overlap. We can distinguish two different contexts, in which Dio's rhetorical strategies differ. In the first, Nero is shown as a performer in the original context of such performances, as an artist in artistic contexts: for example as actor in the theatre or as charioteer in the circus. In the second context, Nero is depicted as a performer in the political and social world of the emperor, that is, in situations in which he ought to behave as an emperor.

(1) Let us first look at Nero as an artist in artistic settings. Here, Nero is not only criticized as an emperor, who should not behave in this way,[131] but also as an artist, whose qualities are questioned.[132] These deconstructions are directed against the appreciation of Nero's performance arts, which was wide-

127 For games in Cassius Dio cf. the helpful collection of Newbold 1975.
128 Cf. p.74–76; 61–63.
129 For the representation of the historical Nero as artist, the problems it involved, and its social background see p.73–74.
130 On Nero as performer in Cassius Dio cf. Gowing 1997, 2568–2580.
131 See also Dio Chrys. *Or.* 3.133–134: Nero's singing and performing on stage is at odds with the role and duties of an emperor.
132 The critique of Nero's artistry as of bad quality is different from positions that characterize his artistic achievements as positive but regard it as disgraceful that the emperor should strive for perfection in artistic accomplishments, as e.g. Ps.-Lucian *Nero* 6.

spread even among the aristocracy.[133] We have already seen Boudicca's negative verdict on Nero as a bad lyre-player (κιθαρῳδῷ, καὶ τούτῳ κακῷ, 62.6.5). As a charioteer he is depicted as falling off the chariot during a race in Olympia (62[63].14.1). Nero's activities as epic poet (παρεσκευάζετο δὲ ὡς καὶ τὰς τῶν Ῥωμαίων πράξεις ἁπάσας συγγράψων ἐν ἔπεσιν, "he was now making preparations to write an epic narrating all the achievements of the Romans", 62.29.2) are discussed under the rubric of ridiculous things (ὁ δὲ Νέρων ἄλλα τε γελοῖα ἔπραττε, 62.29.1). Dio's reader is to understand that Nero—completely aside from the issue of his being emperor—failed as artist. There are passages set in artistic contexts that additionally show how the role of artist and that of emperor overlap: in such passages Nero is portrayed as an emperor who makes use of his power to influence art and performances to his own advantage. Thus, Lucan is forbidden from writing poetry because he receives high praise for his work (62.29.4). Other people are forced to perform against their will,[134] such as the magistrates performing on stage during the *Iuvenalia* (62[61].19.3). As mentioned above, Dio's Nero has them take off their masks in the theatre so that everyone can recognize them. He is clearly contrasted with emperors who restrict or forbid the participation of the aristocracy at the games.[135]

These passages illustrate the fact that Nero remains emperor also, or in particular, when he is active as an artist. The confusion of his two roles is even further underlined when Nero gives his personal facial traits to the masks that he wears on stage (62[63].9.5).[136] Another anecdote illustrates that people did not distinguish between Nero's two roles: a soldier is said to have run on to the stage to free the emperor from the chains in which he was held (62[63].10.2).[137]

133 Cf. Champlin 2003, 66; Flower 2006, 209–212.

134 This is not convincing from a historical perspective. The younger members of the aristocracy were indeed at least in some cases interested in performing actively as a gladiator etc. See p.74–75.

135 There are numerous examples. Already Caesar did not permit a senator to participate in a *naumachia*, even though he wanted to; only knights were allowed (43.23.4–5). Augustus forbids sons of senators and grandsons of knights from performing on stage (54.2.5). Dio deems it worthy of mention that knights and noble women perform on stage during a festival of the praetor Quintus Crispus (55.10.11). Claudius has knights perform on stage but only in order to expose and reprove their previous behaviour under Caligula (60.7.1).

136 In a different sense, panegyrical literature praises Nero for not wearing masks, see Sen. *Clem.* 1.1.6 (*difficile hoc fuisset, si non naturalis tibi ista bonitas esset, sed ad tempus sumpta; nemo enim potest personam diu ferre*): because of his naturally good character he does not have to put on a mask and play a role.

137 For both passages and the two parallel passages in Suetonius, where they are not split up as in Dio, see Slater 1996. Slater reads the contention in Dio that the women's masks were all fashioned after the features of the dead Sabina Poppaea (62[63].9.5) as another Ner-

Indeed, the soldier is not the only one to confuse the levels of actor and emperor; in the play, the actor Nero has been put in golden chains because iron shackles are not considered proper for the emperor Nero (πλὴν καθ' ὅσον χρυσαῖς ἁλύσεσιν ἐδεσμεύετο· καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἔπρεπεν, ὡς ἔοικεν, αὐτοκράτορι Ῥωμαίων σιδηραῖς δεῖσθαι, 62[63].9.6).[138] The confusion of the role of artist and the role of emperor is thus used as a method of deconstruction. It has been argued that this confusion was also the intention of the historical Nero. This thesis, prominently advanced by Edward Champlin, may help to explain Dio's technique of deconstruction: Champlin argues that the historical Nero made use of the theatre as a medium of imperial representation in order to present his own life and to legitimate his imperial actions through the plays he was acting in.[139] According to Champlin, Nero himself did not want people to distinguish between him as emperor and his personae on stage, which he carefully chose himself: when Nero played the role of Orestes, the murderer of his mother, he was actually confessing his own matricide. But the important element of the story, so Champlin, was that the matricide of Orestes was a justified murder.[140] The same principle applies to Nero's part as Alcmaeon.[141] And even in *Oedipus* the death of the mother is necessary (although Oedipus does not kill his mother).[142] Champlin contends that Nero also confessed the murder of Poppaea by playing the role of *Hercules Furens*. But, again, he wanted to be regarded as innocent, like Hercules.[143]

To understand Dio's depiction of Nero's roles we do not need to assume that this interpretation was really the historical Nero's intention. But Champlin has certainly made a strong case for an interpretation of Nero's theatre performances that may well have existed already in antiquity. Dio's text opposes this kind of interpretation, since it completely neglects potential strategies of legit-

onian transgression and mockery of tradition: with Poppaea's mask Nero is said to have brought a funerary practice into the theatrical world (see Slater 1996, 39).

138 For the same argument in reality, rather than on stage see e.g. 49.39.6: Dio's Marc Antony has the king of the Armenians put into silver chains because iron chains are unseemly for a king.

139 Champlin 2003, 84–111 analyses Nero's roles and concludes that he wanted to use the performances in the theatre to style himself as another Periander. See also Bartsch 1994, 39: "Nero's stage roles revealed to the emperor's public an uncanny similarity between what the emperor was doing onstage and what he had done off it". Chaniotis 1997, 224–226 discusses, more generally, the "interdependence between the theatrical setting and the theatrical character of public life" (Chaniotis 1997, 225).

140 Cf. Champlin 2003, 97.

141 Cf. Champlin 2003, 99.

142 Cf. Champlin 2003, 102.

143 Cf. Champlin 2003, 107.

imization: Dio sets emphasis on the role and the deeds such as matricide, not on the circumstances and possible exculpations. Nero appears to be as much the murderer of his mother as was Orestes, and as insane as Hercules. Additional information that may excuse their deeds is suppressed. Dio brings out the similarity of Nero to the characters he plays, on the level of their deeds. It is not their motives that are to the fore, but the acts they committed.

(2) Let us now consider the passages that depict Nero as an artist in political settings. Theatre is depicted as having a remarkable influence on Nero's life as emperor. To underline this Dio uses dramatic motifs and language. Dio thereby clearly evaluates negatively the collision of the roles of artist and emperor. He wonders that an emperor who rules the whole world should keep on performing as lyre-player, herald, and actor (ἔχων γάρ, ὡς ἔλεγεν, οἰκουμένην, ἐκιθαρῴδει τε καὶ ἐκήρυττε καὶ ἐτραγῴδει, 62[63].14.4). The clash of Nero's two roles is shown effectively when Dio uses the code and language of the imperial role to describe Nero's actions as an artist in the political context. Thus he contrasts the emperor's titles such as ὁ Καῖσαρ and ὁ Αὔγουστος with his actions of lyre-playing and singing (62[61].20.1–2).[144] This technique is abundantly applied to the narrative of Nero's journey to Greece (62[63].8.1–18.1): Nero's *Augustiani* are his soldiers, the arms they carry are lyres and plectra, masks and buskins (62[63].8.3–4), to give only two examples. This, ironically, makes the description of Nero's artistic endeavours in Greece appear to be the most military episode in the Nero narrative.[145] The description of this trip focuses on the bad artist Nero; but the language and motifs recall the role of emperor, which Nero fails to play.[146]

Dio's narrative on the conflict of Nero's roles develops: as the story goes on, Nero is depicted less often as an emperor who plays the role of artist, and more and more as an artist who has to play the role of emperor. The peak of this development is Dio's version of Nero's last days, a passage that Xiphilinus preserves most probably (almost) in full, demonstrating Dio's narrative skills.[147] We are shown an artist Nero who lives a parallel life opposed to the expectations people have of him as a ruler. These expectations are present in the narrative

144 For the discrepancy between the content depicted and the language describing it cf. Schulz 2014, 410. For Dio mirroring a chaotic situation with his syntax cf. Gleason 2011, 73.

145 On Nero's insignificance in the narrative on military endeavours cf. p.243–244.

146 A political action, the declaration of Achaea's freedom (from taxes), is deconstructed by presenting Nero as a devastator of Greece who kills its people (62[63].11.1).

147 Cf. Edmondson 1992, 249, who compares the narrative skills exhibited in this passage with those on the fall of Sejanus (58.12) and Caligula's triumph at Baiae (59.17) in Dio, two text sections that have come down to us directly.

through statements about what Nero does not do: the reader is presented with what an emperor ought to undertake, as a foil to which Nero's actual behaviour can be contrasted. When Nero learns of Vindex' revolt, he is not impressed. He does not hurry to Rome to take charge of matters, but practises with an athlete instead, and writes a letter of excuse to the senate: he explains his absence by his hoarseness, implying that he would like to sing to the senate even during this crisis (λέγων βραγχᾶν, καθάπερ τι ᾆσαι καὶ τότε αὐτοῖς δεόμενος, 63.26.1). Neglecting political affairs, he still indulges in his artistic activities and takes care of his voice (63.26.2). When he is sure that Vindex will be defeated, he seems to react in a highly escapist way (63.26.3). Dio's Nero summons senators and knights not because of the current political situation, but because he wants to present a new water organ to them (63.26.4–5). Signs foreshadowing his doom are neglected by him (63.26.5). Only when he hears that Galba has been proclaimed emperor and that Rufus has deserted him does he get frightened and take action (63.27.1). After realizing that he has been left alone, he plans to murder the senators, burn the city, and move to Alexandria—to live there, as we heard already, as a private citizen and lyre-player (63.27.2). Dio's Nero is then left by his guards, he flees, and hides in fear (63.27.3–28.5). Dio remarks explicitly that fate had designed this role for Nero so that he should no longer play the parts of other matricides and beggars but at last his own role (τοιοῦτον γὰρ δρᾶμα τότε τὸ δαιμόνιον αὐτῷ παρεσκεύασεν, ἵνα μηκέτι τοὺς ἄλλους μητροφόνους καὶ ἀλήτας ἀλλ' ἤδη καὶ ἑαυτὸν ὑποκρίνηται, 63.28.4). Dio's Nero attempts to commit suicide but fails in this final action which would be worthy of an emperor. Epaphroditus has to help him (63.29.2). His last words relate to his artistry: "O Zeus, what an artist dies in me!" ("ὦ Ζεῦ, οἷος τεχνίτης παραπόλλυμαι", 63.29.2). Dio has his Nero finally become what he had always wanted to be all along. The metamorphosis from emperor to artist is accomplished.[148]

4.2.3 Domitian as Military Autocrat

Dio's Nero almost declines to take up the imperial role and, as the narrative proceeds, increasingly enjoys his favourite role, that of artist. The deconstruction of the imperial role works differently for Domitian: Dio shows that Domitian takes up the proper role, but plays it wrongly. He differs from Dio's Nero because he knows the part of *princeps* and tries to make use of it to his own advantage. Dio's Domitian, however, overdoes this and fails too.[149] As mentioned above,

148 See also Bartsch 1994, 43–44: "After a life spent acting on the stage, the site of the performance has finally been transferred from stage to life".

149 We saw something similar with Tacitus' Domitian and his rejection of manly behaviour, see p.104–105.

Dio deconstructs Domitian's representation mainly by focusing on his representation as a military leader. We have already seen that (Tacitus' and) Dio's Domitian stages fake triumphs that are not based on real victories. As a military leader he is characterized by his inactivity and cowardliness.[150] In the war against the Dacians, for example, during the *prima expeditio Dacica*, Dio's Domitian hangs back from the scene of the fighting, stays in a city in Moesia, and indulges in a wanton life (ὕβριζεν ὥσπερ εἰώθει, 67.6.3). Domitian's inactivity is made more plausible by his following depiction as indolent and cowardly, and as corrupt and lustful towards women and boys (67.6.3). Because of his lazy character other commanders have to lead the war for him (67.6.3). Dio's Domitian is clearly contrasted with emperors who actively participate in their own wars.[151]

Dio connects Domitian's lack of his own achievements with the success of others. His Domitian rejects responsibility for defeats and blames his commanders (67.6.4), but he claims successes for himself for which he is not responsible (67.6.4). Dio's Domitian hates those who succeed and blames those who do not (καὶ ἐμίσει μὲν τοὺς κατορθώσαντάς τι, ἐμέμφετο δὲ τοὺς πταίσαντας, 67.6.4). His behaviour precisely opposes the advice given by Maecenas in his programmatic speech to Octavian: Maecenas suggests that Octavian should not show jealousy of the accomplishment of others. This would only result in fear of jealousy and so in a preference for defeat over victory. The ruler would then suffer harm from his own jealousy (52.33.8–9).[152] Dio's Domitian is characterized as an emperor whose behaviour as military leader runs counter to Maecenas' advice.

150 We find the reproach of cowardliness directed against a military leader prominently in Cicero's attack on Marc Antony (45.39.4).

151 Octavian participates in battle despite his weak constitution (47.41.3–4). The depiction of Trajan is based on Domitian as a negative foil. The comparison, as mentioned above, is especially apt since Trajan also waged war against Decebalus, but in contrast to Domitian, so Dio, in person instead of entrusting it to others (καὶ ὁ Τραϊανὸς δι' ἑαυτοῦ καὶ αὖθις, ἀλλ' οὐ δι' ἑτέρων στρατηγῶν, τὸν πρὸς ἐκεῖνον πόλεμον ἐποιήσατο, 68.10.3). For Trajan actively participating in war cf. 68.14.1; 68.23.1; for Hadrian as a model of this behaviour cf. 69.9.3.

152 In addition, Dio has his Agrippa give a piece of advice to a commander under an emperor, which the narrator explicitly supports: since people in power do not like it if anyone outdoes them in military success and since the glory of their subjects worries them, Agrippa advises that a man who wants to come out alive should relieve his masters of undertakings which involve great difficulty and reserve the successes for them (49.4.4). This analysis is supported shortly later in the narrative when Marc Antony is portrayed as jealous of the successes of his commander Ventidius (49.21.1).

4.3 *Selecting the Content: Materials versus Performances*

4.3.1 Building Endeavours

In the previous sections I have examined the aspects of Nero and Domitian that provide suitable focus points for Dio's critique. We now turn to the other side of Dio's selection process. The focus on some topics implies the scarcity, neglect, or even suppression of other topics. One of the topics that Cassius Dio does not emphasize is (imperial) building endeavours.[153] One could still see several of Nero's and Domitian's building works in Rome in Dio's time. But he seems to have ignored these projects because this topic of imperial representation was deemed unfavourable for his argument.

The context of Dio's own time would suggest that imperial building endeavours would be very relevant at least for his depiction of contemporary history. The building programme of the Severans was the most extensive since Augustus.[154] In addition to the building activities themselves, the massive marble plan *Forma Urbis* shows a strong interest in recording and documenting the city and its buildings.[155] A recent study by Alain Gowing (2016) has shown, however, that Dio does not make buildings an equally important topic in his *Roman History*.[156] The same is true of Dio's use or neglect of inscriptional evidence, another "monumental source".[157] In fact, he is only interested in buildings if they are of contemporary relevance, and if they function as symbols

153 As outlined on p.64–65, I understand building endeavours in a broad sense, referring to several forms of material representation such as palaces, temples, theatres, but also statues and triumphal arches, etc.

154 Cf. Gowing 2016, 118. See also Gowing 2016, 127: "The Severan building program certainly rivaled and surpassed that of past regimes, with the possible exception of the Flavians." For the Severan reconstruction of Rome see Lusnia 2014.

155 Cf. Gowing 2016, 127: "This massive and incredibly detailed map was produced between AD 203–211, covered a large wall inside the Templum Pacis in Rome and depicted practically every architectural feature in the city." See also Lusnia 2014, 148–155.

156 Dio mentions, without going into detail: the theatre of Pompey, as positive (39.38.1); Caesar's Forum, as not negative (43.22.2–4); Caesar wanted to build a theatre like that of Pompey, but could only lay the foundation for the theatre which was later completed by Augustus as the theatre of Marcellus (43.49.2–3; 53.30.5; 54.26.1); the theatre of Statilius Taurus (51.23.1); building endeavours of Agrippa (53.27); the temple of Jupiter Tonans erected by Augustus (54.4.1–4); some buildings of Augustus; the theatre of Balbus (54.25.2); under Vespasian, the temple of Pax, and the colossus (65[66].15.1); buildings destroyed by the fire of 80 CE (66.24.2–3: Dio mentions only some of the buildings; the reader, he says, may infer how the rest were damaged).

157 Stuart 1904, 145. Stuart studies Dio's rare use of inscriptions (Stuart 1904, 134 detects only four possible cases). See Stuart 1904, 126 for Dio's neglect of the Monumentum Ancyranum.

or manifestations of power or the misuse of power.[158] Dio also uses building endeavours to evaluate emperors and their imperial representation. The good emperor Vespasian, for example, restores buildings and puts the name of the original builder on them, not his own (65[66].10.1[a]). This contrasts sharply with Septimius Severus' behaviour, who restored a large number of buildings and inscribed his own name on them, just as if he had erected them in the first place from his own private funds (*καί σφισι τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ὄνομα ὡς καὶ ἐκ καινῆς αὐτὰ καὶ ἐξ ἰδίων χρημάτων κατεσκευακὼς ἐπέγραψε*, 77[76].16.3). Dio's Caracalla even has his own buildings destroyed. Their only purpose was to make the senators poorer by taking their money for the buildings (78[77].9.7).[159]

Before we turn to the buildings of Nero and Domitian we should consider Dio's general reflections on the topic of building projects, which we find, again, in the speech of Maecenas in book 52. In his speech to Octavian, Maecenas is aware of the difference between things that are perceivable for a long time, and actions and events that are no longer perceivable once they are over. Dio's Maecenas knows that the ontological status of solid material differs from performative forms of representation.[160] They outlast time (at least to a certain degree) and can be seen (and used) for a long period. For imperial representation, Maecenas prefers the second category: he advises not to put up any statues, or golden or silver images, but to create images in the hearts of the people, which will never perish; he suggests that one not build temples but live according to virtue (52.35.2–6). In this way, the whole earth will be a hallowed precinct, all cities will be temples, and all men statues (*πᾶσα μὲν γῆ τεμένισμα ἔσται, πᾶσαι δὲ πόλεις ναοί, πάντες δὲ ἄνθρωποι ἀγάλματα*, 52.35.5). In a comment on Septimius Severus' statues Dio takes up this view of his Maecenas and repeats that it is not material but virtue that preserves the memory of rulers (*ἀρετὴ γὰρ ἡ διαφυλάττουσα τὴν μνήμην τῶν κρατούντων*, 74[73].14.2[a]). When Dio neglects building endeavours to a certain degree, in particular those that found approval among the people, this is in accord with his low esteem for this form of imperial representation, as expressed in Maecenas' statements, and is not to be explained only by the epitomized nature of the text.

158 See Gowing 2016, 118. Unlike Tacitus and Livy, Dio does not use buildings in an allusive way (cf. Gowing 2016, 119).

159 We can contrast Julius Caesar's pursuit of construction as opposed to Caracalla's aim of destruction: Caesar rebuilds Corinth and Carthage even though the people are hostile towards him. He sees no reason to feel ill will towards places on account of the behaviour of the people who live there (*μηδὲν διὰ τὴν ἐκείνων ἔχθραν τοῖς χωρίοις τοῖς μηδέν σφας ἀδικήσασι μνησικακήσας*, 43.50.5).

160 On the different ontological status of different forms of imperial representation see also p.66.

Dio discusses Nero's and Domitian's buildings only selectively, although both the historical Nero and the historical Domitian made building endeavours an important part of their imperial representation.[161] When mentioned, they are often deconstructed by associating their funding with crime and murder. We have studied several examples in the contexts of the previous sections: the gymnasia in Baiae and Ravenna were able to be finished so soon thanks to the murder of Nero's aunt (62[61].17.1–2); Seneca, distancing himself from the society of the emperor, which does not prevent his death, bestows his entire property on Nero to help pay for his buildings (62.25.3); Nero's project of building a canal across the Isthmus is closely connected with the murder of the Sulpicii Scribonii and of Corbulo (62[63].17.1). The practical purpose that the canal was to serve is not mentioned by Dio. By contrast, Dio praises the bridge over the Ister, which the good emperor Trajan erected, although it was, as Dio concedes, completely useless. But Dio claims that the bridge, which he describes at length (68.13.1–6), revealed the magnitude of Trajan's designs (ἡ μὲν οὖν μεγαλόνοια τοῦ Τραϊανοῦ καὶ ἐκ τούτων δείκνυται, 68.13.5).

Especially with Domitian, who undertook so many building projects, the scarce mention of building projects is striking. Not one building is mentioned in a positive way. The road from Sinuessa to Puteoli is, in the epitomized text, mentioned without any negative additions at least (67.14.1). The other buildings that appear in the text are coded negatively. We have come across the example of Domitian's estate in the Alban Hills before: it is characterized as isolated, and illustrates Domitian's reclusiveness (67.1.2); he uses it as a retreat, in fear of his father Vespasian (65[66].3.4). In his study there, he impales flies on a stylus (65[66].9.4), as mentioned above. The property is mentioned again in the context of Glabrio's execution, who had performed there as a gladiator (67.14.3).

In the extant text, Dio mentions Domitian's triumphal arches, but not until they are torn down after Domitian's death. They appear in the text only when they disappear in the world. Dio states that such destructive acts, which also include Domitian's silver and golden statues, were motivated by the hatred of the people (68.1.1). Domitian had clearly not followed the advice of Maecenas to Octavian that a monarch should not have any golden or silver images made of him (52.35.3). Statues are often used to evaluate the behaviour of an emperor or an imperial figure. Dio's Sejanus for example is said to have had so many statues that one could not even count them (58.2.7). Nerva, by contrast, forbids that golden or silver statues be erected for him (68.2.1). The relevance of these statues, which Dio explicitly frames as negative, becomes apparent

161 See p.64–65.

when we keep in mind that, for Dio, they aim to evoke the presence of the person depicted.[162] Dio's statues are often treated as persons or substitutes for a person: Caligula's statues are guarded (59.26.3); a statue of Augustus is taken elsewhere so that it does not have to watch the bloodshed of a public execution (60.13.3); Marcus Aurelius has a golden statue of Faustina watch in the theatre (72[71].31.2); the maltreatment of the statues of Commodus substitutes for the maltreatment of his real body (74[73].2.1).[163] When Dio contends that the whole world was filled with Domitian's silver and golden statues (67.8.1), he illustrates that the autocratic person of Domitian was everywhere. By destroying these memorial acts[164] after Domitian's death, Dio's Roman people react to and cancel Domitian's wish to be ubiquitously present.[165]

4.3.2 Deconstructing Performances: The Ritual in Written Form

In Dio performances by emperors feature more often than material forms of representation. They are a fruitful field of deconstruction which is applied to both Nero and Domitian. In Domitian's case this ties in well with the depiction of his character as capable of simulation.[166] Let me repeat that the historical Domitian did not trigger as many points of direct criticism as Nero—with the exception of associating himself closely with the gods. Dio therefore makes use of the antithesis between 'appearance' and 'reality', which the ancient historians use to present hidden and concealed things behind the events that they describe: this difference between appearance/surface and reality/substance is applied not only to Domitian's character but also to his performances.

The transient character of a performative ritual, as outlined above, is apt for deconstructing Domitian's achievements: once a performance is over, we cannot capture it in any material form. Representation in the form of a performance in principle cannot be checked afterwards, as a building or a statue can. As a medium of imperial representation, a triumph is thus significantly differ-

162 For the discussion of the living presence of art works in art history see e.g. Eck 2010, who discusses the experience of how images can affect their viewers in the same way as persons (from the perspective of modern theories of agency). On art and agency see also Eck 2015, 45–66.

163 Cf. 58.11.3 for the identification of image and person as regards Sejanus: τάς τε εἰκόνας αὐτοῦ πάσας κατέβαλλον καὶ κατέκοπτον καὶ κατέσυρον ὡς καὶ αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνον αἰκιζόμενοι ("they hurled down, beat down, and dragged down all his images, as though they were thereby insulting the man himself").

164 For statues as memorial acts and indicators of the relationship between senate and emperor cf. Kemezis 2012, 390–392.

165 See p.38 for this purpose of Domitian's historical imperial representation.

166 Cf. p.200.

ent from a coin. Dio makes use of this ontological status of performances when describing Domitian's triumph (probably of 89 CE): it is unmasked as a fake triumph (67.7.4). Domitian merely acts as if he had truly conquered the Dacians (καθάπερ ὡς ἀληθῶς κεκρατηκώς, 67.7.3).[167] Dio contends that the Romans even have to pay for the purported victory over Decebalus.[168] When Dio calls the Romans the slaves of Domitian, the purpose of a military victory and its celebration appears in a perverted form. A letter of Decebalus, which evidently confirmed Domitian's victory, is called a forgery, at least in a rumour (67.7.3).[169] Domitian's triumphal games too (of either 86 or 89 CE) are called merely alleged celebrations of victory (ἑορτάς τινας νικητηρίους δῆθεν ἐπιτελῶν, 67.8.1). The motif of rewards not gained legitimately is also applied to Nero and his prizes at the games. At the *Neronia*, Dio's Nero takes the crown for lyre-playing without a contest (62[61].21.2). That Nero's victory at the Olympic games of 67 CE was not a real victory is supported by later events: Galba reclaims the money with which Nero had bribed the judges (62[63].14.1).

Dio is aware of the vanity of events that have a performative character. We can observe this also when we analyse his comments on written statements—i.e. words materialized instead of just uttered orally. Written documents appear as a danger when they provide proof against someone, and Dio evaluates how people deal with this kind of proof.[170] In Dio, writing things down is depicted as a form of preserving things said and done, which transforms a performative act into a written and material status. We can illustrate this by the behaviour of the senators at the beginning of Nero's reign. The senators under Nero have a delusional sense of the importance of written things. Nero's first speech in the senate, composed by Seneca, is not given in detail by Dio, but we are told that

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167 See 59.16.11 for a similar reproach against Caligula, who was granted an ovation *as if* he had defeated some enemies (τά τε ἐπινίκια τὰ σμικρότερα ὡς καὶ πολεμίους τινὰς νενικηκότι πέμψαι αὐτῷ ἔδωκαν). See Lange 2016, 106–107 for Caligula's mock triumphs in Dio, which express Caligula's contempt for the senate.

168 The historical peace was most probably achieved by compromise. Cf. Strobel 1989, 93.

169 Strobel 1989, 91 assumes with good reasons that this rumour was part of Trajan's propaganda, which was intended to make Trajan's own Dacian war of 102 CE excel Domitian's one. When we compare the parallel events under Trajan in Dio, no similar accusations are made. Decebalus there sends legates to the senate who confirm the peace treaty (68.9.7).

170 Dio's Caesar destroys documents that could be negative for his enemies (41.63.5–6; 43.13.2), which he himself mentions in a speech (43.17.4). See also 44.47.5; 52.42.8. Caligula takes copies of incriminating documents and burns them, not the originals (59.4.3; 59.10.8; 59.16.3); Claudius later burns the originals (60.4.5). Otho burns letters expressing hostility to Vitellius shortly before his death (63[64].15.1[1]; 1[a]). Lucius Maximus is praised explicitly for destroying Antonius Saturninus' papers, which could have become dangerous for other people (67.11.1–2).

the senators liked it very much (61.3.1). When the speech as a performative act is over, the senators try to preserve it. They impose two memorial measures: the speech is to be inscribed on a silver tablet, and it is to be read at the beginning of each consulship. Relying on these measures of materialization and repetition on which they have decided themselves, the consuls expect a good principate, as though they had a written guarantee for it (ὡς καὶ κατὰ συγγραφήν τινα, 61.3.1). But, as we know from the following depiction of the principate, the written, materialized status of the text is no guarantee.

4.4 *Omissions*

Elements that are not selected to be part of the text are omitted from it. Such omissions can be considered another device of deconstruction. We may distinguish three different forms:

(1) Dio omits pieces of historical information from his *Roman History*. We have to be cautious, of course, in arguing *ex negativo* in the epitomized passages of the text.[171] However, omissions are also a general technique of historiographers,[172] and there are passages in Dio's original text in which we can see that he does himself suppress pieces of information that do not tie in well with the account he wants to create. Christopher Pelling has shown that Dio, in a text passage that has come down to us in the original version, makes use of this technique when he significantly does not mention the alliance of Luca in 56 BCE because it does not suit the narrative that he has developed.[173] So it is at least possible that the potentially positive pieces of imperial representation that do not feature in the text have been left out by Dio on purpose. This could be the case for Domitian's successful war against the Chatti in 89 CE, which is not discussed in the extant text.

(2) A piece of information is sometimes not left out completely, but important details are omitted which could present the piece of information in a com-

171 Xiphilinus can completely omit even important events. For example, he does not mention Claudius' invasion of Britain in 43–44 CE at all, see Edmondson 1992, 29.

172 Cf. Champlin 2003, 52 on Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio suppressing information that would have been too positive for Nero.

173 See Pelling 2009a, 517: "By that point he has so set up his narrative that his usual exploration of the principals' motives would leave him (and were he to have included Luca, his reader) baffled. (…) Dio infers that whatever happened in 56–5 BCE must have been an alliance of Pompey and Crassus *against* Caesar—something that left no room for the usual way of treating Luca as a triple alliance. He must have been familiar with that tradition, but must also have thought it mistaken: and motives, imaginative focalisations, are why he would be so suspicious. The focalisation may help us to understand, not merely what the narrative does say, but what it does not."

pletely different context and light. In these cases the lack of specification or precision makes Dio's statements more persuasive. We have already seen an example of this technique in the account of Nero's marriage to Sporus in Greece (62[63].13.1–2): here Dio talks only of Nero's unconventional marriages, those with Sporus and Pythagoras, but omits the normatively acceptable one with Messalina. In fact, Pythagoras is always mentioned together with Sporus in Cassius Dio (see also 62.28.2–3; 63.22.4). The omission of Messalina in this context of marriages is typical of Dio. Suetonius also mentions Pythagoras, whom he calls Doryphorus, together with Sporus in his rubric on Nero's *libido* (Suet. *Ner.* 29). However, the fact that Messalina is not mentioned at that point is explained by the rubric system: Nero's legal marriages are dealt with later in the rubric on *crudelitas* (Suet. *Ner.* 35.1). In Tacitus, as we have seen, Pythagoras is not left out of the narrative prior to the point at which the marriage with Sporus would have been depicted, a passage in the *Annals* that has not come down to us. The figure of Pythagoras is still imporant without Sporus, as a narratological device: he presents an important link between Nero's transgressions through the banquet of Tigellinus, the marriage itself, and before the Great Fire (Tac. *Ann.* 15.37.4).[174] Only Dio combines Pythagoras and Sporus in a way that entails the effective omission of Nero's marriage with Messalina.

Likewise, when discussing the funding of certain forms of imperial representation, Dio sometimes leaves out certain sources of money, so that the costs appear higher for the funding group that he focuses on. Tiridates' journey to Rome through several cities cost the public treasury 800,000 sesterces a day, we learn (62[63].2.2). No other funding source than the public treasury is given in the extant text. We know from epigraphic material, however, that the provinces shared a major part in these costs.[175] Without this piece of information we are under the impression that the Roman treasury alone paid for everything. A similar omission of funding sources may occur in relation to the temple of the deified Poppaea. We are told that a great part of the money had been stolen from women (ἐκ γὰρ τῶν χρημάτων ἃ πολλὰ καὶ παρὰ τῶν γυναικῶν ἐσεσύλητο ἐξειργάσθη, 63.26.4). It was common practice, however, for people to give money voluntarily for such temples, and probably also for Poppaea's.[176] Dio conceals the context of this practice, which makes the allegedly stolen money stand out.

As for Domitian, Dio is extremely selective in his report about his censorship, for which the historical Domitian was highly praised in contemporary panegyr-

174 See p.125–126.
175 See Edmondson 1992, 230–231.
176 See Edmondson 1992, 247.

ical literature.[177] We only learn, as mentioned above, that Dio considers his censorship for life to be ἄνοια (67.4.3; cf. 53.18.5). Further information is omitted. An important detail about Arulenus Rusticus, one of Domitian's victims, is also left out. Arulenus Rusticus is said to have been killed because he was a philosopher and had called Thrasea holy (τὸν γὰρ δὴ Ῥούστικον τὸν Ἀρουλῆνον ἀπέκτεινεν ὅτι ἐφιλοσόφει καὶ ὅτι τὸν Θρασέαν ἱερὸν ὠνόμαζε, 67.13.2). We do not hear any information that could cast doubt on this reason. But we know that Arulenus Rusticus had accepted a suffect consulship for 92 CE from Domitian, which does not suggest that he had a tense relationship with the emperor.[178] In addition to these cases, which code an imperial action as negative, the lack of specification and details can be used to support the praise of a good emperor: when Dio depicts Titus positively in contrast with Domitian, he mentions that Titus had killed no senator (67.2.4). But the detail that this is only true for Titus' time as emperor is omitted here,[179] because it would spoil the effect of the comparison.[180]

(3) A third form of omission takes place within the text. This type concerns not so much the relationship with real events but rather a text-internal silence: Dio's Nero can be absent from the text, or within the text.[181] Sometimes Nero disappears from the text completely. During the events in Britain (62.1.1–12.6) he does not figure as an emperor who is in touch with his commander. In fact, in the whole passage that has come down to us he is only mentioned by Boudicca in her speech, who paints the unmanly picture of him analysed above. The Roman commander Paulinus does not talk about the emperor Nero in his speeches at all (62.9.1.–11.5). Of course, the historical Nero was not present in Britain. But the fact that he is left out of the narrative too is a decision by Dio.[182]

177 See p.89–90.

178 Cf. Murison 1999, 255. Such passages in which it is highly probable that Dio (and not only Xiphilinus) is suppressing information that would not fit his version may allow us to speculate about other passages. The murder of the Sulpicii Scribonii and Corbulo (62[63].17.1–2), for example, which, as discussed above, is connected to Nero's canal project in Corinth and which is made persuasive by the focalization of Nero and Corbulo, is stylized in a very literary way. If there was a conspiracy that involved the three victims (cf., again, Edmondson 1992, 241 on the conspiracy of Annius Vinicianus), it would indeed be effective to omit it.

179 It is mentioned in 66.19.1: οὐ μὴν ἀλλ' ὁ Τίτος οὐδένα τῶν βουλευτῶν ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ ἡγεμονίᾳ ἀπέκτεινεν ("Be that as it may, Titus during his reign put no senator to death").

180 The death of Eprius Marcellus and Caecina Alienus had in fact earned Titus a lot of hatred. Cf. Murison 1999, 174–175; 181 and 66.16.3–4.

181 We have observed this device in Tacitus' depiction of Nero's military endeavours too. See p.57–61.

182 By comparing Nero's absence to that of Dio's Claudius, we can see that this omission has a

Another strategy is used to underline Nero's absence from Armenia, where Corbulo led the war. Differently from the account on Britain, Nero features relatively often in this passage dealing with the events of 64 CE and the following years. But his presence within the text is used to point out his absence from the events. The figure of Nero gives an implicit legitimization for his absence at the beginning of this part of this narrative: he knows that Corbulo is the ideal commander (62.19.2–4). The instances in which Nero is mentioned point either to his absence from the war or to his power. His absence is highlighted when Nero is depicted as receiving embassies (62.20.4; 62.22.3). His remaining absent is made explicit: since he fell while performing a sacrifice he remained at home (62.22.4). We could think of a logical explanation for Nero's behaviour: the stumbling could be interpreted as a bad omen for the journey. Dio, however, presents Nero's decision as implausible and focuses on the result that he stayed at home. Suetonius and Tacitus also refer to Nero refraining from a journey and staying at home, both in the context of his plans to travel to Alexandria and his visit to a temple of Vesta, but with different effects. In Tacitus, as we have seen, Nero is shown trembling in the temple of Vesta because of his fear, which is explained by his consciousness of his crimes (Tac. *Ann.* 15.36.2).[183] Suetonius includes this instance in the part of his *Life* that deals with Nero's positive deeds and his journeys (Suet. *Ner.* 19.1).[184] He gives us a less psychological and more rational version of the story: Suetonius' Nero interprets it as a threatening omen that the fringe of his garment was caught when he tried to stand up in the shrine of Vesta.[185] Therefore he stayed at home. Dio, presenting a similar story, is not interested in a rational or psychological explanation; he simply puts emphasis on Nero's absence from the place where he ought to be.

Nero's images displayed at the conference of Rhandea, although they were exhibited in order to evoke his presence, actually highlight his physical absence (62.23.3). Other mentions of his name underline his power, which appears to be independent of his physical presence. Nero figures as the one who has the power to assign Armenia to whomever he pleases (62.20.2; 62.21.2; 62.22.3). He, not Corbulo, finally receives the honours; he is acclaimed as *imperator* and holds a triumph that opposes tradition (62.23.4).[186]

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certain effect on the reader. During the campaign Claudius communicates with Plautius as part of a team. When the situation becomes too difficult he goes to the site of the war himself (60.21.1–2). Plautius receives Claudius' praise and even an *ovatio* (61[60].30.2).

183 See p.87; 140.

184 See. p.273–277; 278–280; 309–310 for Suetonius' rubrics and the division of the *Life of Nero*.

185 See Kierdorf 1992, 184 for parallel passages in other authors about similar omens.

186 For Nero's triumphs see also p.195–196. We can, again, compare Claudius for contrast:

5 Spoiling the Atmosphere

5.1 *Negative Emotions: Dilemmas and Fear*

To deconstruct the atmosphere under an emperor, the emotions people feel and the way they cope with them are depicted negatively. By showing what the emperor and his subjects feel, the text creates an atmosphere full of emotional paradoxes and fear. We will first look at the uneasiness of emotions, then focus on the emotion of fear.

The atmosphere under a bad emperor means that one cannot show one's emotions openly, even in situations in which this is culturally approved, such as after someone's death. Displaying such emotions was forbidden under Dio's Commodus (74[73].5.3). Under Caracalla, Julia Domna is not allowed to show her grief even in private after the murder of her son Geta (78[77].2.6). Death and murder are often presented as resulting in joy rather than grief. Even when this emotion concerns a character in the narrative who is bad, the contrast between repressed grief and open joy over death and murder will make the reader feel uneasy. For example, after the murder of Agrippina the people rejoice because they think that this is the beginning of Nero's end (62[61].15.1). The senators only simulate their joy at Agrippina's death, with the single exception of Thrasea Paetus (62[61].15.1–4). The hope that Nero may have died during a storm on his way back from Greece makes many people rejoice (62[63].19.2), but only briefly since for some the fact that they had prayed and hoped that Nero might perish provided Nero with a motive to kill them. Joy and death finally coincide in the narrative when the dead are regarded as fortunate (62[61].19.4).

The relationship between the cause of an emotion (e.g. death) and the emotion itself (e.g. grief, joy) is often presented as disturbed. One of the reasons for this is the emotional dilemma produced by communication with bad emperors. After Drusilla's death, for example, no emotional reaction is right for Dio's Caligula. He censures grief as well as joy (59.11.5). Dio shows that it does not even solve the dilemma if one takes Domitian's feelings as a model and tries to imitate them: people were never sure whether they should share his grief or his joy; in the former case they could offend his real feelings, in the latter case they might lay bare Domitian's insincerity (καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι οὔθ' ὅπως συνάχθοιντο οὔθ' ὅπως συνήδοιντο ἀσφαλῶς εἶχον, τὸ μὲν ὅτι τὴν γνώμην αὐτοῦ λυπεῖν, τὸ δὲ ὅτι τὴν προσποίησιν ἐλέγχειν ἔμελλον, 67.2.7). Dio enjoys describing

when he holds his triumph, Dio underlines that everything was in accordance with tradition, although it was hard for Claudius given his physical condition (60.23.1).

such dilemmas and he underlines them with rhetorical devices such as parallelisms and antitheses.[187]

The most prominent emotion in Dio's imperial narrative is fear.[188] Fear can determine the actions of both emperors and senators (or other subjects). Nero puts the most influential people to death because he is frightened of possible attacks (φοβούμενος τοὺς δυνατωτάτους μὴ ἐπίθωνταί, 62[63].17.1). Dio's Domitian fears prisoners even in chains (καὶ ἐκείνους καὶ δεδεμένους ἐδεδίει, 67.12.5). His wife Domitia always lived in fear of death because she had always been subjected to Domitian's hatred (ἥ τε γὰρ Δομιτία ἀεί ποτε ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐμισεῖτο καὶ διὰ τοῦτ' ἐφοβεῖτο μὴ καὶ ἀποθάνῃ, 67.15.2). Fear also characterizes the contemporary atmosphere. Everyone is frightened of Commodus (73[72].15.1; 20.2; 21.1), and the cowardly emperor is terrified himself (73[72].13.6). Dio's contemporaries are most afraid of Plautianus (ὥστε καὶ αὐτῶν τῶν αὐτοκρατόρων μᾶλλον πάντας καὶ φοβεῖσθαι αὐτὸν καὶ τρέμειν, 77[76].4.5). An anecdote illustrates that fear no longer correlates with guilt. When the emperor is looking for a culprit in the senate who is bald, all the senators without hair become frightened, including those who are sure that they have done nothing wrong; and even Dio himself touches his own head to check whether his hair is still there (77[76].8.2–7).

Fear is such an important driving force that Dio reflects on it on an abstract level. He argues that fear cannot go together with rational reflection (οὐ γὰρ ἐθέλουσιν οἱ λογισμοὶ τοῖς φόβοις συνεῖναι, 42.1.5). According to Dio, fear impedes thoughtful actions. It also prevents people from displaying their thoughts and feelings openly, so it provides a reason for hypocritical behaviour. We learn this from a crucial scene which shows the reaction of the senators to Octavian's speech in the senate in 27 BCE, in which he declares that he wants to lay down power: those who believe him cannot show their pleasure, being restrained by their fear (διὰ τὸ δέος), or their hope; those who do not believe him do not dare to expose his insincerity because they are afraid (ὅτι ἐφοβοῦντο), or do not care to do so (53.11.3). In another passage that reflects upon fear, Dio's Livia in her dialogue with Augustus observes that the punishment of some people makes others experience fear and that this fear is the reason for their hostility (ἐξ ὧν ἂν αὐτοὶ φοβηθῶσιν, ἐχθίους γίγνονται, 55.21.2).

187 Lintott 1997, 2502–2503, discussing antitheses in Dio in general, refers to the influence of rhetorical education and dilemmas in rhetorical school exercises.

188 For fear as typical of the relationship between emperor and senators in Dio cf. Gowing 1992, 21–22. Cf. also the short remarks on fear in Kuhn-Chen 2002, 174–176.

5.2 *Laughter and Ridicule*

One way in which Dio's characters sometimes deal with fear is laughter—in the sense of relief of a psychological tension[189]—as when Dio describes Commodus, who had just killed an ostrich, in the senate (73[72].21.1–2).[190] Commodus is holding the head (and probably neck) of the ostrich in his left hand and the sword in his right hand.[191] He threatens the senators that they will suffer what the ostrich suffered. What is meant to be a terrifying gesture by Dio's Commodus, misses its effect. The senators, among them Dio himself, are about to burst into laughter. Only Dio's trick of taking leaves from his laurel wreath and chewing them suppresses the laughter. Dio's Commodus is here portrayed as an emperor who is ridiculous even when he tries to terrify people. But, while also being ridiculous, he is still terrifying: the senators are not allowed to show their laughter.

Dio uses laughter to deconstruct emperors: his characters laugh much more than those in Tacitus; they also laugh at emperors when they do not seem to fit into the imperial role. Vitellius is laughed at twice, once by the people and once by the senators. People laugh at him because of the discrepancy between his former rather loose behaviour and his new serious imperial conduct (64[65].5.1). Senators sneer at Vitellius when he thinks he can step down from the emperorship by offering them his sword (64[65].16.6). Julianus gives the senators reasons to laugh because of the dilettantism of his reign and his fortifying of the palace, where he reckons he will be safe in the event of defeat (74[73].16.3–4).

Inappropriate behaviour by the emperor is also the reason why Nero's audience laughs at him. During his performance at the *Iuvenalia* his voice was so thin and unclear that it made people in the audience laugh and cry at the same time (ὥστε καὶ γέλωτα ἅμα καὶ δάκρυα πᾶσι κινῆσαι, 62[61].20.2–3). As Dio's description of Nero's voice is supposed to point out, the emperor is inappropriate in two roles at once: as an artist in the role of the *princeps*, and as a bad performer in the role of a serious artist. When the people join the official applause of the Augustiani, with the single exception of Thrasea Paetus, they appear delighted from the outside (ὡς καὶ χαίροντες), although they actually lament what is going on (ὀδυρόμενοι) (62[61].20.4).

189 Cf. Beard 2014, 38–39 for the modern theory of laughter as relief.

190 For this scene see Plass 1988, 70; Hose 2011, 117; Beard 2014, 1–8.

191 It is striking that Dio's Commodus, a proud lefthander who holds the sword in his left hand during gladiatorial fights, has it in the right hand here (73[72].19.2; 22.3).

But Dio's characters are not the only ones to laugh. Some passages clearly have the potential to amuse the reader too.[192] Among them are Dio's satirical depictions of bad emperors, such as the above-mentioned scene of Commodus and the ostrich's head (73[72].21.1–2). The figure of Nero seems to be most suitable for a satirical depiction.[193] I have already examined Boudicca's view of him and the Romans (62.3.1–6.5), which has clear satirical elements. It is precisely Nero's artistic representation that Dio uses for satirical elements in Boudicca's speech but also when, for example, people pretend to faint and get carried out of the theatre as if dead in order to avoid watching Nero's performances (62[63].15.3). The whole account of Nero's artistic journey in Greece (62[63].8.1–10.3) has satirical traits.[194] However, satire involving Nero is not merely funny and meant to amuse. Despite the entertaining effect that these passages clearly have, Nero's behaviour as depicted has serious consequences. Even when ridiculous the emperor still has the power to kill great numbers of people, including in Greece, the country that he claims to have set free (62[63].11.1). The portrait of Nero may entertain and amuse, but it is neither innocent nor enjoyably funny.

The reader is invited to laugh at Domitian in an episode concerning the Dacian war. Dio downplays the Roman victory over the Dacians at Tapae in 88 CE, because it would otherwise be too positive for Domitian. He does so, for example, by putting emphasis on a detail that is embarrassing for the Romans and for Domitian. Dio's Dacians deceive the Romans by the simplest tricks. Vezinas, the second-in-command of the Dacians after Decebalus, pretends to be dead and can thus escape (67.10.2). Decebalus saves his royal residence by putting up tree trunks in armour: the Romans think they are soldiers and withdraw in fear (67.10.3). Dio asserts that this really happened (ὃ καὶ ἐγένετο, 67.10.3). But these reports are not very convincing. They rather turn the Roman victory under Domitian into a ridiculous episode. The most satirical and invective part of Dio's *Roman History* is the depiction of the reign of Elagabalus, to which we will soon turn.[195]

192 Cf. Edmondson 1992, 42 on Dio's irony, wit, and humour with reference to 59.5.5; 59.17; 59.25.2–3; 59.26.9; 59.27.6.

193 Dio's negative image of Nero is hence different from those in non-historiographical critical discourse (esp. *Octavia*), in which the negative image of Nero is mainly based on showing him as a tyrant of whom one has to be afraid, as compared to Domitian's negative image (in the *Panegyricus*), which involves both fear and ridicule (see Cordes 2017, 314).

194 For a detailed analysis of Nero's journey to Greece in Dio see Schulz 2014, 409–413.

195 See p.252–254.

CHAPTER 8

Deconstruction and the Construction of Memory

1 Typologies of Bad Emperors

1.1 *Nero and Domitian Recalling Julio-Claudian Emperors*

In the previous chapter we saw how the techniques that Dio uses to deconstruct, i.e. to reshape to negative effect, Nero's and Domitian's imperial representation are not applied exclusively to these two emperors—he uses them for other emperors as well. And these techniques are not the only device that produces the impression of unity and continuity in Dio's work.[1] Dio also creates unity by explaining things from a contemporary point of view and by including both prolepses (foreshadowing) and analepses (flashbacks), which connect different reigns.[2] Additionally, Dio establishes explicit or implicit typologies of emperors from the beginning of the principate to his own times. Similarities in literature may, of course, be based on similarities in reality. But it is the decision of each writer how much to underline or ignore them. The figures of Nero and Domitian are part of the typologies that Dio creates: they both recall emperors who ruled before them, mainly Caligula and Tiberius.[3]

Before we study these similarities between emperors more closely, we should underline that *topoi* are not blindly applied to every bad emperor in the same way.[4] They are, rather, used differently for different figures and their use also depends on the historical facts about the emperor in question. Caligula, Nero, Domitian, Commodus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus have enough in com-

1 Cf. Schulz 2019a, 313–315 for questions and devices that characterize Dio's *Roman History* as a whole.

2 For example, there is a reference to Vespasian in the depiction of Caligula's rule (59.12.3). In the context of the triumphal honours given to Agricola by Titus, there is a reference to Domitian, who will later have him killed (66.20.3). Pertinax is mentioned in the war under Marcus Aurelius, in which he excels (72[71].3.2); the reader later understands better why the enemy knows him already (74[73].6.1). For proleptic references to contemporary history in earlier periods see: 40.14.4 (on the Parthians in Dio's time); 51.17.3 (Egypt under Octavian and Septimius Severus); 55.23.7 (legions in Augustan times and under Septimius Severus); 58.14.1 (Sejanus compared to Plautianus); 68.31.2 (Hatra under Trajan and Septimius Severus).

3 Cf. Pelling 1997, 117 for Dio's "taste for common and typical traits rather than individual and idiosyncratic".

4 Cf., more generally, Dunkle 1971, 19: "these rhetorical commonplaces can express some truth about tyranny. These terms are not entirely meaningless if they are employed analytically and responsibly, not just to make narrative or fictitious speeches more colorful and sensational."

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mon to be recognizable as the type of bad emperor, but they also have enough individual traits not to get mixed up.[5] Dio's depiction of these emperors may be compared with modern advertising, which on the one hand has to draw on established patterns of persuasion, but on the other hand has to distinguish itself from these patterns in order to be recognizable. Advertisements and Dio's images of bad emperors have to achieve the highest possible degree of both variety and redundancy.[6] The aspect of redundancy allows the reader to recognize patterns, the aspect of variety gives the emperor an individual twist. We should therefore not conceive of a *topos* as a meaningless pool of literary motifs that is simply applied to any text. *Topoi* and stereotypes draw on certain patterns of interpretation that are fixed in a society. These patterns have a high interpretative power.[7]

Several *topoi* in the account of Nero recall Caligula.[8] Like Nero after him, Dio's Caligula is enthusiastic about and spends enormous sums of money on actors, the theatre, and horses (59.2.5; 59.13.5). He wishes to perform as a dancer and actor on stage (59.29.6), and is not willing to play his role as emperor or even as human being (καὶ πάντα μᾶλλον ἢ ἄνθρωπος αὐτοκράτωρ τε δοκεῖν εἶναι ἤθελε, 59.26.8). He is extremely cruel (59.10.2–3). Just as Nero does later, he urgently asks the leading men of the senate to come to him—not to talk about politics, but to dance for them (59.5.5). Like his nephew, he will not accept it if people do not attend his performances in the theatre (59.7.5). Dio also depicts the beginnings and ends of Caligula's and Nero's reigns in similar ways. Caligula's behaviour towards the senate at the beginning of his reign foreshadows Nero: Caligula at first aims at a good relationship with the senate (59.6.1–7), just like Nero. The plan to murder Caligula is carried out when he announces once more that he will perform as a dancer and in a tragedy (59.29.6).

Dio explicitly compares Caligula to Nero and to Tiberius. Tiberius was less bad than Caligula, since he had at least kept power in his own hands (59.5.1–2). Caligula, by contrast, was ruled by charioteers and gladiators, and was the slave of actors and others connected with the stage (Γάιος δὲ ἤρχετο μὲν καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἁρματηλατούντων καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ὁπλομαχούντων, ἐδούλευε δὲ καὶ τοῖς ὀρχησταῖς καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῖς περὶ τὴν σκηνὴν ἔχουσι, 59.5.2). Nero later follows in the steps

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5 That these misdeeds are highly individual is mirrored in the fact that a list of vices in Dio, as presented in Kuhn-Chen 2002, 165–172, helpful as it is, does not capture exactly what Nero and Domitian are reproached for.

6 See Bense 1982, 313 for this definition of modern advertising.

7 On the function of stereotypes and typological motifs in Dio cf. Gleason 2011, 59; 78. Cf. de Blois 1999, 267: "Clichés were a means for getting a grasp on and interpreting reality."

8 That Nero recalls Caligula is prominently pointed out later by Eutropius and Orosius: Eutr. 7.14.1; Oros. 7.7.1.

of Caligula and even surpasses him (πρὸς τὸν Γάιον ἔτεινεν. ὡς δ' ἅπαξ ζηλῶσαι αὐτὸν ἐπεθύμησε, καὶ ὑπερεβάλετο, 61.5.1). Domitian too recalls Caligula, above all in his contradictory character (59.4.1–5; 59.23.5).[9] But Domitian is mainly similar to Tiberius in his capacity for *simulatio* (57.1.1–6). At the end of his life Dio's Domitian is explicitly associated with Dio's Nero and is even presented as his avenger: he banishes and kills Epaphroditus, Nero's freedman, because he had not defended Nero (ἐπικαλέσας αὐτῷ ὅτι μὴ ἤμυνε τῷ Νέρωνι); by doing so he aims to create a precedent for all freedmen (67.14.4).

1.2 *Nero and Domitian Foreshadowing Later Emperors*

The imperial typologies to which Nero and Domitian belong are also relevant to Dio's own times: Nero and Domitian not only recall Caligula and Tiberius, they also foreshadow later emperors.[10] Especially Commodus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus are characterized along similar lines as Nero and Domitian, and so are deconstructed by similar means.

Commodus recalls the bad emperors of the first century in many ways. He is depicted as a mixture of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian. Like Caligula[11] he performs as a gladiator (73[72].17.2; 19.2).[12] As with Nero, the wrong company makes him worse (73[72].1.1). He does not wish to expose himself to hard work (73[72].1.2; 2.2), knows only wantonness and entertainment, and fulfils almost none of his tasks and duties (73[72].9.1; 10.2–3). Dio points out his misuse of titles and names (73[72].16.1), as he does in Nero's case. Commodus also takes money from rich people to spend it on his amusements (73[72].16.3). Just like Nero, Commodus too stages his own performances by directing his audience (73[72].20.2). With Commodus, as with Nero, child's play (παιδιά) can switch to seriousness (73[72].19.5). Domitian's reign is also recalled by the atmosphere of fear under Commodus.[13] The murders commit-

9 That Domitian was less similar to his father and brother than to Nero, Caligula, and Tiberius is pointed out by Eutropius (7.23.1): *Domitianus mox accepit imperium frater ipsius* [scil. *Titi*] *iunior Neroni aut Caligulae aut Tiberio similior quam patri vel fratri suo*.

10 On Nero cf. Gowing 1997, 2587–2588. Dio's contemporary emperors are even foreshadowed in the figures of the regal period, see Schulz 2019a, 315–319. Cf. Mallan 2014, 762 for the pattern of judging rulers by their conduct towards the elite as applied already to Tarquinius Superbus.

11 Dio's Commodus also recalls Dio's Caligula in that both their predecessors, Marcus Aurelius and Tiberius, use the metaphor of the rising and the setting sun to refer to their successors (58.28.4; 72[71].34.1).

12 For Dio, gladiators are among the most disdained human beings (51.7.2). Cf., e.g., the prohibition of a senator from performing as gladiator in 38 BCE (48.43.2–3).

13 Cf. p.246.

ted with poisoned needles, which happened under Domitian,[14] reappear under Commodus, as Dio explicitly states (ὅπερ που καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ Δομιτιανοῦ ἐγεγόνει, 73[72].14.4).

At the same time the figure of Caracalla reminds us of Nero and Domitian.[15] After the death of Plautianus, Caracalla and his brother Geta lack a controlling authority, as does Nero after the death of Agrippina. Now they go to every extreme in their conduct: they outrage women, abuse boys, embezzle money, and make gladiators and charioteers their companions (77[76].7.1). With Agrippina and Plautianus, Dio chooses two very negative characters who manage to regulate a negative character disposition (of Nero and Caracalla, respectively) for some time. Their influence prevents the bad characters of Nero and Caracalla from breaking through completely. Caracalla excuses his absence from the senate, as Nero does, by his hoarseness (78[77].3.3; *Petr. Patr. Exc. Val.* 136).[16] He performs as charioteer (78[77].10.1), associates himself with the Sun God's method of driving (78[77].10.3), reveres the cithara-player Mesomedes (78[77].12.7), and learns to dance (78[77].21.2). Caracalla recalls Domitian in their common enmity towards their brothers and especially in their character trait of simulation and paradoxical behaviour:[17] Caracalla hates those people most whom he purports to love most (78[77].11.5); the hatred for his brother is manifest, among other things, in the abolition of the observance of his birthday (78[77].12.6). He buys an alleged defeat from his enemies (78[77].14.2), and kills a Vestal virgin whom he himself has raped (78[77].16.1). His treatment of adulterers also recalls Domitian (78[77].16.4).

The peak of all bad emperors, in whom all the negative forms of imperial representation come together, is Dio's Elagabalus.[18] Especially in sexual and religious matters he is even more transgressive than all the emperors before him. He is shameful, lawless, and cruel in an innovative way (80[79].3.3). He kills a certain Gannys by his own hand because the man had tried to force him

14 Cf. Murison 1999, 249 on 67.11.6: "More likely, it was an outbreak of food poisoning".

15 Caracalla is also associated with proto-imperial figures who are negative: he visits Sulla's grave because, so Dio, he imitated his cruelty (78[77].12.7). Furthermore, Caracalla is associated with Commodus. Dio's Septimius Severus compares his son to Commodus in a way that is negative for him: he blames Marcus Aurelius because he did not quietly dispose of his son, and he threatens Caracalla with this remark (77[76].14.7). Indeed, Caracalla later recalls Commodus when he is said to have supported the killing of his father during an illness (77[76].15.2).

16 Nero and Caracalla treat the senate in a similar way, cf. Davenport 2012, 813.

17 On similarities between Domitian and Caracalla cf. Murison 1999, 23–27.

18 For Elagabalus recalling Nero see Osgood 2016, 189; for Elagabalus recalling Commodus and Caracalla see Osgood 2016, 186–187.

to live temperately and prudently (80[79].6.3). Under his rule several people take leave of their senses (80[79].7.1–2). Dio's Elagabalus performs as a charioteer (80[79].14.2), and dances in the orchestra—but also, in a sense, when he walks, sacrifices, accepts honours, or gives a speech (τά τε γὰρ ἄλλα καὶ ὠρχεῖτο, οὔτι γε ἐν ὀρχήστρᾳ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐμβαδίζων τρόπον τινὰ καὶ θύων ἀσπαζόμενός τε καὶ δημηγορῶν, 80[79].14.3). He has himself circumcised and wants his genitals to be cut off, dresses as a priest in a barbaric costume, and is called "the Assyrian" (80[79].11.1–2). He sleeps with a Vestal virgin in order to father a god (80[79].9.3). He sets himself above the gods and enjoys sexual excesses (80[79].13.1–4). He wants to gain the reputation of an adulterer in order to imitate the most debauched women (80[79].15.3). A certain Aurelius, who is known for his large genitals, is brought to Elagabalus and receives an escort larger than that of Abgar under Severus or Tiridates under Nero (80[79].16.2). He crosses gender-boundaries, but even tries to break through the boundaries of sex: thus he appears as man and as woman (καὶ περὶ μὲν τῶν γάμων αὐτοῦ, ὧν τε ἐγάμει ὧν τε ἐγήματο, αὐτίκα λελέξεται· καὶ γὰρ ἠνδρίζετο καὶ ἐθηλύνετο καὶ ἔπραττεν καὶ ἔπασχεν ἑκάτερα ἀσελγέστατα, "an account will be given presently of his marriages, in which he both married and was bestowed in marriage; for he appeared both as man and as woman, and in both relations conducted himself in the most licentious fashion", 80[79].5.5) and wants to look and appear like a woman (80[79].14.4); his wish is so strong that he even desires a woman's vagina and asks his doctors to give him one (ἐς τοσαύτην δὲ συνηλάθη ἀσέλγειαν ὡς καὶ τοὺς ἰατροὺς ἀξιοῦν αἰδῶ γυναικείαν δι' ἀνατομῆς αὐτῷ μηχανήσασθαι, μεγάλους ὑπὲρ τούτου μισθοὺς αὐτοῖς προϊσχόμενος, "he carried his lewdness to such a point that he asked the physicians to contrive a woman's vagina in his body by means of incision, promising them large sums for doing so", 80[79].16.7).

This short overview shows how closely Dio's historiography comes to satire and invective in the account of Elagabalus. We have seen satirical elements in other depictions of bad emperors before,[19] but for Elagabalus they abound. This satire has been read as drawing attention to the disturbing political trends after the death of Marcus Aurelius: Elagabalus is the disastrous climax of these trends produced by the Severan dynasty.[20] He is the last emperor whose fall Dio himself both experienced and described. At the end of Dio's work, the reigning *princeps* is Severus Alexander. In that period Dio no longer spent much time in Rome (80.1.2–3). He could only relate briefly the events up to his own second

19 See p.247–248.

20 See Osgood 2016, 180; 185.

consulship (80.2.1), which are not long or detailed enough to draw either a positive or a negative picture of this emperor.[21] But with the satirical peak of Elagabalus, we could say, Dio clears the way, at least on a literary level, for Severus Alexander, who is applauded for awarding Dio the consulship (80.5.3). He also follows the climax of the bad emperors and is invited to produce a strong antithesis to the previous emperor, by not becoming another Elagabalus, Caracalla, Commodus, Domitian, Nero, or Caligula.

2 Hot Memory: Why Nero and Domitian?

2.1 *Communicative and Cultural Memory in Cassius Dio*

When Dio makes Nero and Domitian foreshadow contemporary emperors of the third century CE, he assigns a new meaning to these *principes* of the first century CE. This process of meaning-making can be better described and understood with the help of theories of collective memory. Following Jan Assmann, I wish to apply some central terms used in memory studies to Cassius Dio and his *Roman History*: collective memory, communicative memory, cultural memory, and hot memory. There are two forms of collective memory: communicative and cultural memory. The two latter terms refer mainly to two different levels of remembered time. Communicative memory contains memories of the recent past, memories that a person shares with her contemporaries; it encompasses around 80 years.[22] According to Jan Assmann, half of this time, a period of 40 years, is an important inner division and a critical threshold: "After forty years those who have witnessed an important event as an adult will leave their future-oriented professional career, and will enter the age group in which memory grows as does the desire to fix it and pass it on."[23] Cultural memory refers to earlier fixed points in the past, including, for example, foundation myths; it is not factual history and does not aim to remember the past 'as it was', but as matters for the identity of the group.[24] By 'hot memory' we refer to cultural memory from a distant past that is still relevant for the present and the communicative memory. Hot memory uses the depiction of a shared

21 Cf. Scott 2015, 174.

22 Cf. Assmann 2011, 36. For Dio of Prusa, for example, Nero is still part of communicative memory: in the dialogue on beauty he decides not to take examples from olden times, but to talk about "Nero and subjects of that kind, more recent and inglorious, which I can remember" (ἀλλὰ Νέρωνος καὶ τοιούτων πραγμάτων νεωτέρων τε καὶ ἀδόξων ὧν μνημονεύω, Dio Chrys. *Or.* 21.11).

23 Assmann 2011, 36.

24 Cf. Assmann 2011, 37–38.

(imagined or 'real') past to contribute to the development of present issues and intentions, and to the identity of the social group that is remembering.[25]

When we apply this theory to Cassius Dio and his *Roman History* and assume that he became active as a writer around the year 193 CE, we may construct the following context: the communicative memory of his time reaches back roughly 80 years to the end of Trajan's and the beginning of Hadrian's reign.[26] The time in which Dio grew up, 40 years before he started writing, was the heyday of the Antonine principate under Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius.[27] We can detect the clear literary fingerprints of these two memorial watersheds in Dio's work.

The first half of this communicative memory—reaching roughly from Trajan, Hadrian, and Antoninus Pius to Marcus Aurelius—is styled as a single entity. This is achieved on the one hand by pointing out the break between Domitian and Nerva/Trajan,[28] and by the similarities between Dio's Domitian and Tiberius, which brings the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties closer together: Dio's Domitian seems to come full circle to what Tiberius had started.[29] This circle also creates a textual unity from which everything that follows can be distinguished: Nerva and Trajan appear to incorporate a new beginning even more clearly when the period before them is presented as a unit. On the other hand, possible breaks after Trajan, especially in the reign of Hadrian, are not underlined, but rather ignored or presented as insignificant. Accordingly, the period from Nerva/Trajan to Marcus Aurelius is presented as another unit, as a period of good emperors.[30] A good example of this technique is Dio's ambi-

25 See Assmann 2011, 62–69, who coins this term with reference to the concepts of 'cold' and 'hot' societies by Claude Lévi-Strauss (esp. Assmann 2011, 51–53).

26 Cf. Millar 1964, 36. For the reign of Hadrian, Dio also underlines his direct access to sources. For Hadrian's coming to power he speaks of his father as source (69.1.3). Additionally, he refers to a letter of Hadrian, in which the emperor writes how horrible it is that he is not able to die (69.17.3).

27 Cf. Scott 2015, 162 for the importance of the later Antonine dynasty to Cassius Dio: "The admiration that he held for this period in which he grew up shaped his views of the emperor (and others) in his adult age."

28 For the relevance of this break for the Antonines and the Severans cf. Kemezis 2014, 275: "The emergence of the good ruler Trajan from the tyranny of Domitian remained the founding moment of the Antonine-Severan dynasty and a key watershed at which the favorably remembered past began." However, Cassius Dio's depiction of Trajan is not exclusively positive, see Seelentag 2004, 488–492: in contrast to the merely positive view of Trajan in the second century, Dio's portrait of Trajan also has negative traits.

29 Cf. also p.200–201 for the similarities of Tiberius' and Domitian's character in Dio.

30 This does not contradict Kemezis' division of the *Roman History* into four main narratives,

valent treatment and estimation of Hadrian.[31] This becomes apparent when Dio mentions that Hadrian was bad at the beginning and at the end of his reign and that he was therefore almost not divinized (69.2.5; 69.23.2). But, by saying so, Dio also confines Hadrian's negative behaviour to a certain time. Antoninus Pius finally succeeds in having the senators assign divine honours to Hadrian (70.1.2–3).[32] This positive evaluation of Hadrian's memory (after diverse negotiations between Antoninus Pius and the senators) has a great advantage for Dio's text: Hadrian is more useful for Dio as a good emperor than as a bad one. Treating Hadrian as a good emperor allows Dio to make the period from Nerva to his ideal *princeps* Marcus Aurelius appear as one continuous entity. He can thus underline the break between Marcus Aurelius and Commodus all the more.[33] Thus in Dio, this transition is not only one of the worst emperors following the best, but even a whole era changing. As we heard before: a Golden Age turns into an age of iron, even of rust (72[71].36.4).

By contrast, the second, more recent half of the communicative memory—including Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, and Septimius Severus—figures as a time of severe change, which, as mentioned above, provides the key to understanding the whole work.[34] These roughly forty recent years of communicative memory are depicted not only as a change from gold to rust (from Marcus Aurelius to Commodus), but also as a change back to dynastic rule (from Commodus to Septimius Severus). At the beginning of this dynasty stands Septimius Severus, an ambivalent figure in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, who is difficult to interpret. Dio has not created a coherent master-narrative for him. The negotiations about him were obviously still going on, his memory still very recent. Most contemporary readers had lived under his rule; much of the 22 years that

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namely Early and Middle Republic, Late Republic, Principate, and Contemporary History (cf. Kemezis 2014, 98), but just differentiates two periods within the Principate.

31 For Dio's Hadrian see also Juntunen 2013, in particular 111–117 on the different phases of Hadrian's rule regarding his relationship with the senate, and Migliorati 2003, 337–368 on the crisis between Dio's Hadrian and the senate.

32 It was mainly the historical Antoninus Pius who made sure that Hadrian would be remembered as a good emperor. The senators originally even wanted memory sanctions against Hadrian. On senatorial negotiations of Hadrian's memory cf. Flower 2006, 275: "Pius created an image of a world without punitive sanctions, in which Hadrian would not be remembered as another Nero or Domitian. His new politics of memory reflected a novel sense of elite consensus, as the senators recognized Pius as one of their own and were willing to deify Hadrian as a gesture of goodwill toward his successor."

33 Cf. Schwartz 1899/1957, 398, who favours a tripartite division of the *Roman History*: from the beginnings of Rome to Augustus; from Augustus to Marcus Aurelius; from Commodus to the end of contemporary history.

34 See p.181.

Dio spent in the city of Rome coincided with Septimius Severus' reign.[35] His dynasty is still in power. The question of how he should be evaluated has not yet been answered finally.

For Dio as narrator and author of the *Roman History*, Septimius Severus plays an important role.[36] Dio's two previous, shorter works had been quite positive about him. But his attitude towards him seems to have changed, as is reflected in the narrative. Septimius Severus becomes—both in history and in literature—an ambivalent figure as a ruler.[37] At the beginning of Dio's narrative, the emperor honours Pertinax, whom Dio favours, organizes a ceremonial funeral, and gives a laudatory funeral speech himself. He thus associates himself clearly with Pertinax at the beginning (75[74].4.1–5.5). After his victory over Albinus, Septimius Severus changes his point of reference.[38] Now he follows Commodus and sets himself in the tradition of Marius, Sulla, and Augustus (76[75].7.4–8.4).

Dio's contemporary readers share his communicative memory. Unlike Tacitus' readers, not one of them had lived under Nero or Domitian. But when the third century re-negotiates how to define good and bad emperors,[39] the similarities with the bad emperors of the first century become significant again. This interpretation ties in with reading the memory of the bad emperors in the first century as 'hot memory' and the stories about them as 'myths' in Jan Assmann's sense: "Hot memory not only measures out the past, as an instrument of chronological orientation and control, but it also uses past references to create a self-image and to provide support for hopes and for intentions. This is called myth."[40] Dio assigns meaning to these memories, which makes them 'hot' for the present times and for the future. He is treating the highly important question of how the contemporary emperors are to be evaluated compared to Nero and Domitian. The 'myth' has to be given a new meaning. In Dio's case, 'hot' memory of the early Roman emperors helps to define a good monarch in the third century CE. Dio evaluates the present by comparing it to the distant past.[41]

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35 For the time Dio spends in the city of Rome see Gowing 2016, 117.

36 Dio has Septimius Severus feature in his text as instigator of Dio's literary work. Dio's Septimius Severus says to Dio (79[78].10.1–2): "Come here, Dio; draw near, that you may both learn accurately and write an account of all that is said and done."

37 See Madsen 2016, 154–156; Rantala 2016, 160–161.

38 On Septimius Severus' change in this passage cf. Hose 2007, 461–463. For Dio's Lucius Tarquinius Priscus as foreshadowing this change of conduct see Schulz 2019a, 322–323.

39 The criteria differ depending on the ruling emperor, cf. Davenport 2012, 813–814.

40 Assmann 2011, 62.

41 Cf. Gowing 1992, 292.

2.2 *Historiography as Medium of Collective Memory*

The medium in which Dio presents this hot memory is historiography. It is a crucial medium for the collective memory of the Roman aristocracy. Historiography is an instrument to influence those who share a collective memory.[42] We have seen above that the senate was not a unified, homogeneous group with one attitude towards each emperor, and that Dio is not simply the representative and mouthpiece of a homogeneous social order: the senatorial elite was divided and had different, opposing, and contradictory views about the emperors.[43] As Dio's potential addressees we should therefore think first of the senators.[44] They form a group, a memory community, that defines its identity by a shared memory of the Roman past: the group is dealing with the question of what they do not wish to forget, of what they have to remember.[45] Dio addresses the aristocracy and offers an interpretation of Roman history that can unite them.[46]

From the perspective of the emperors, historiography is a means of power. As a historian Cassius Dio shows that he has power over the presentation of history and the way emperors are remembered in the future, something in which they must have been highly interested. Assmann refers to this relationship between ruler and historiography as the prospective side of the alliance of power and memory.[47] At least indirectly, the *Roman History* therefore also

42 Dio's historiography is hence not only literature for its own sake, as Schmidt 1999, 95; 101 claims.

43 See p.173. It is therefore important for Dio to show what it meant to be a member of the elite from his point of view (see Kemezis 2014, 278).

44 The debate on Dio's readership is still lively. Cf. Ameling 1997, 2492 who thinks of the senators, whom Dio has yet to convince. Gowing 1992, 292–293 thinks of senators who are new to the senate. Senators and (contemporary and later) emperors are mentioned as envisaged addressees by Fechner 1986, 247; 250; Gowing 1992, 292–293; Hose 1994, 424; Ameling 1997, 2491–2493; Hose 2007, 466. Wirth 1985, 13 and Aalders 1986, 290–291; 302 propose readers in the imperial cities. But see Gowing 2016, 118; 122 for the necessity that the reader be familiar with the topography of the city of Rome.

45 Cf. Assmann 2011,16 on memory communities.

46 This is why the contemporary senate is not criticized. On the senators as passive in Dio cf. Kemezis 2014, 142. The senate for example gives more honours to Plautianus than to the emperor Septimius Severus (76[75].14.7), but it is excused for this action since it was, so Dio, mainly Septimius Severus' own fault (αἴτιος δὲ τούτων αὐτὸς ὁ Σεουῆρος μάλιστ' ἐγένετο, 76[75].15.1). There is no evidence in Dio that the contemporary senate could have behaved differently, cf. Gowing 1992, 23–25.

47 Cf. Assmann 2011, 54: "Rulers usurp not only the past but also the future because they want to be remembered, and to commemorate their own deeds by monuments, ensuring that their glory will be narrated, sung, immortalized or, at the very least, recorded in archives. Power 'legitimizes itself retrospectively and immortalizes itself prospectively.'"

addresses every emperor who has an interest in preserving a good memory of his reign after his death. We do not have to assume a clear protreptic or moral purpose to Dio's work;[48] but readers can easily see that emperors are evaluated as good or bad depending on how they play the imperial role.[49] By deconstructing imperial representation Dio makes clear which behaviour will be remembered positively and which negatively. History, as presented by types of emperors, is also to a certain degree repetitive: one may learn something from the patterns evolving, once they are understood, and then eventually change the course of history.[50] Dio seems not too optimistic about the actual influence of his work,[51] and it does not offer much moral advice or didactic impact for his peers.[52] But, as he points out himself (47.11.5), there is still hope

48 Kuhn-Chen 2002, 243–247 reads Dio too one-sidedly as a moralist with didactic and paraenetic intentions, addressing emperors in general. A reading of Dio as moralist is also suggested by Edmondson 1992, 49; 55 (readers are to imitate the virtues that Dio describes) and Rich 1989, 89 (Dio as "political moralist, who sought to draw from the past lessons about how emperors should conduct themselves"). On Dio's paraenetic intentions cf. Fechner 1986, 248–250. Lintott 1997, 2499 categorizes Dio as pragmatic historiography, since it was about *paideia*.

49 Cf. Kemezis 2014, 140; 143: Kemezis points out that Dio does not aim to evaluate an emperor's character from a psychological point of view; he does not think of emperors as individuals in the modern sense, but in roles and structures that are prior to the emperor and his acts (cf. Kemezis 2014, 115–116 about the personalities of the late Republic; Kemezis 2014, 139–140 about emperors). Cf. Kuhn-Chen 2002, 244 for an implicit code of behaviour for emperors, which can be reconstructed. See also Ando 2016, 573 on "a catalog of gestures and actions that can be performed for well or ill", referring to the umbrella term "all those things that a good emperor does" in 74(73).5.2 (about Pertinax).

50 Dio does not subscribe to a teleological concept of history (against Bering-Staschewski 1981, esp. 126–127, who claims that Dio's idea of the development of history was teleological; cf. the review of Manuwald 1984, 678–679). On the relation between predetermination and free will cf. Swan 2004, 9–13: "In short, Dio's universe admits both human and divine free will" (Swan 2004, 11). Dio's Cicero argues for the usefulness of history in his speech after the murder of Caesar, in which he demands amnesty for the murders: the purpose of recalling former evils is to guard against having ever again to suffer their like (44.31.2).

51 Cf. Gowing 1992, 297 for Dio's pessimistic attitude. See Fechner 1986, 248 on Dio's ambiguous attitude towards political development, which he reads as a mixture of fear of decline and hope, and of decadence and stability.

52 In the Nero narrative, the figure of Thrasea Paetus partly functions as a model of behaviour which, however, will not be successful as an individual case. After the matricide, Dio's Nero is no longer criticized by others. He hence must believe that he is effectively concealing his deeds, or, even worse, that they are not wrong. This is supported by the flatterers; the senators pretend to be happy. Only Thrasea Paetus provides an exception (62[61].15.1–4). He is also the only one not to pretend that he likes Nero's performance at the *Iuvenalia* (62[61].20.4).

for development—which depends mainly on the person of the emperor.[53] Historiography as a medium of collective memory is part of that hope, since collective memory organizes the experience of both the past and the present and future.[54]

Dio shows his power over imperial memory most clearly when he critically reacts to emperors who try to manipulate memory and when he himself enacts a kind of textual *damnatio memoriae*. Dio criticizes emperors who try to manipulate memory. He uncovers these attempts and writes against them. Dio's Tiberius, for example, tries to suppress the memory of an architect whose accomplishments he envies. He does so by not permitting his name to be entered in the records, by banishing and finally killing him (57.21.5–7). Dio twice points out that he does not know the name of this person (ἀρχιτέκτων γάρ τις, οὗ τὸ ὄνομα οὐδεὶς οἶδε; οὗτος οὖν ὅστις ποτὲ ὠνομάζετο, 57.21.5). He apparently would have been happy to give his name, had he known it, for the name of a person and his memory are often clearly interconnected in Dio.[55] But, in this case, Dio can at least indicate the gap in memory that Tiberius created. Dio's Domitian likewise manipulates public memory, as we have seen, especially when he tries to offend the memory of Titus (67.2.3) and when he forbids that the names of those who died in the revolt of Saturninus be written down (67.11.3). Dio's Septimius Severus aims to manipulate collective memory when he takes away books from almost all the sanctuaries in Egypt and has the tomb of Alexander closed so that no one will be able to see Alexander's body or read the books there (76[75].13.2).

53 Cf. his general consideration in 47.11.5: "Hence one should neither be so alarmed in the face of the calamities of the moment as to lose all hope, nor be so carried away by his immediate elation as to be reckless, but, by placing his expectation of the future midway between the two, should make reliable calculations for either event." Contemporary times are understood as bad, but this process of deterioration can be turned around, cf. Ameling 1997, 2482–2484; Murison 1999, 27; Swan 2004, 13. Cf. also Hose 2007, 467.

54 Cf. Assmann 2011, 28: "Thus collective memory operates simultaneously in two directions: backward and forward. It not only reconstructs the past but it also organizes the experience of the present and the future. It would therefore be absurd to draw a contrast between the 'principle of memory' and the 'principle of hope,' because each conditions the other and each is unthinkable without the other."

55 On the close connection of name and memory in Dio cf. 63(64).6.5[1]: the centurion Septonius Densus defends Galba to his own death; his name is therefore worth remembering (καὶ διὰ τοῦτό γε καὶ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνέγραψα, ὅτι ἀξιώτατός ἐστι μνημονεύεσθαι). See also 67.10.1 about the regulation of Tettius Julianus in the war against the Dacians in 88 CE, according to which soldiers should write their names and the names of their centurions on their shield so that good and bad deeds may be more easily recognized. Dio mentions this among the noteworthy events during the war. He has a strong interest in the possibility that good and bad deeds can be assigned clearly to their initiators.

In these examples Dio presents himself as the corrector of memory, who at least points out gaps in memory even if he cannot fill them. Other instances show him as executing a literary *damnatio memoriae*. After there had been no memory sanctions under the Antonine dynasty Septimius Severus re-introduced new ones.[56] Dio reacts to this new practice by himself engaging in literary memory sanctions: the contemporary practices of *damnatio memoriae* influenced Dio's view and presentation of contemporary history.[57] But he also thinks of his work as conducting its own forms of *damnatio memoriae*, as we see most clearly in the case of Caracalla. When Dio mentions that Caracalla did not suffer *damnatio memoriae* he states that the people no longer called him "Antoninus" (79[78].9.2–3).[58] He himself refrains from calling him "Antoninus" too. From now on Dio conducts his own *abolitio nominis* and refers to him only by his nicknames such as "Caracallus" or "Tarautas".[59] This is certainly not a coincidence produced by the epitomization of the text.[60]

3 Genealogies versus Typologies

The damnation enacted by nicknames has further consequences. They not only deride Caracalla, they also leave him without a genealogy: he no longer belongs to any dynasty.[61] The same applies to Dio's Elagabalus and his several unfavourable nicknames (80[79].1.1).[62] Like his use of nicknames, we can also read Dio's typology of bad emperors as directed against imperial genealogies. One of Dio's main points of criticism about the Severans is that they went back to dynastic rule as opposed to electing a suitable successor independent of his family and

56 On memory sanctions in the Roman Empire see Flower 2006, whose book ends with the Severans. In addition, Gleason 2011 offers important information about the revival of memory sanctions under the Severans. On the changed circumstances of the senators since Commodus and the revival of memory sanctions in this period see Gleason 2011, 37–39.

57 Gleason 2011 convincingly interprets Dio's contemporary anecdotes about masquerades and unstable identities in the context of practices of *damnatio memoriae* in his time.

58 Cf. Gleason 2011, 66.

59 "Caracallus" is the nickname for his transgressive foreign clothing style (79[78].3.3).

60 Especially since we have the original text from 79(78).2 to 80(79).8.3 preserved in the manuscript Vaticanus Graecus 1288 (with gaps).

61 Caracalla's official name, given to him by Septimius Severus at the beginning of the reign, was Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (cf. Rantala 2016, 164).

62 Cf. Osgood 2016, 181–183 on "Pseudo-Antoninus".

genealogy.[63] The Severans did indeed make genealogies an important part of their imperial representation.[64] They were well aware that a regime needs an origin and memory.[65] The Severan dynasty hence legitimated itself by a close association with the Antonine dynasty. The Severan period is shaped by the attempt to establish such genealogies, which entails new narratives about the past.[66] This included bogus familial connections. Septimius Severus was the first emperor to develop a fictive lineage to another emperor, Marcus Aurelius, consistently in all media of imperial representation.[67] He associated himself both with the Antonines and with Augustus.[68]

Dio deconstructs such genealogical claims in his work.[69] First, he underlines the constructed character of lineages and genealogies and has his figures construct them themselves. Dio shows Septimius Severus searching for a father and has a certain Auspex, who is known for his jokes, congratulate him on finally finding one in Marcus Aurelius (77[76].9.4). But, as briefly touched upon above,

63 Cf. Madsen 2016, 139; 155–157. Davenport/Mallan 2014, 657–661 read Dio's version of Hadrian's adoption speech as directed against the contemporary practice of dynastic rule.

64 See Lusnia 2014, 46–49 for Septimius Severus.

65 Cf. Assmann 2011, 53–54 on the relationship between power, in the sense of political rule, and memory.

66 Cf. Kemezis 2014, 5: "Part of what emperors needed consensus approval of was their own version of their personal and dynastic histories and the significance of those stories within the larger history of the Roman people."

67 Cf. Hekster 2015, 205–217.

68 On Septimius Severus' representation as a second Augustus and the perception of this representation around 200 CE cf. Barnes 2008, esp. 251; 256–259; 264; 266, on the Augustan notion *ob rem publicam restitutam* (on the triumphal arch against the Parthians 203 CE), on the autobiography, on the marriage laws, and the Saecular Games. On the association of the historical Septimius Severus with Augustus and the Antonines cf. Swain 2007, 12; 17–18. Cf. also Gleason 2011, 56 on the association of Septimius Severus, who was neither by birth nor by adoption part of a dynasty, with Antonine genealogy as justification of his succession. On genealogies in the second century in general and the role of tradition and legitimization of a reign by associating the ruler with an earlier emperor or dynasty cf. Dmitriev 2004, 213–214. On the imperial representation of Septimius Severus cf. Rubin 1980, 21–40.

69 We can thus read Dio as part of a contemporary critical discourse that fundamentally questions the narratives about the past developed by the Severans. Kemezis has shown this in his study of Cassius Dio, Philostratus, and Herodian. He regards the change in political circumstances after the dynasty of the Antonines as the reason for this critical discourse about the past: there is no longer consensus about how to interpret the past (Kemezis 2014, 4; 8; 11; 14; 277). On Dio's role in this discourse cf. Kemezis 2014, 92: "Dio challenges the emperors of his time not only on their presentation of themselves, but on their interpretation of how all of Roman history works, on the origins and role of the monarch, and on the forces that drive change for good and for ill." Cf. Kemezis 2014, 103–104; 146.

Septimius Severus also styles himself as the brother of Commodus (76[75].7.4) and sets himself explicitly in a series not only with him, but also with Marius and Sulla[70] (76[75].8.1). He distances himself from Caesar and Pompey: their clemency, as Dio's Septimius Severus points out, proved their ruin (76[75].8.1).[71] Elagabalus likewise constructs his own genealogy.[72] He purports to be Caracalla's son (80[79].2.2) and allegedly aims to emulate Augustus and Marcus Aurelius (80[79].1.3).

A second way in which Dio deconstructs imperial genealogies is by offering alternative typologies into which emperors can be set. For Nero, who is only the adoptive son of Claudius, Dio has his Boudicca construct a disgraceful genealogy: she depicts him, as we have seen, as a woman, and puts him in a series with Nitocris, Semiramis, Messalina, and Agrippina (62.6.2–3).[73] The character Boudicca is taking up the narrator's typology, as Dio has previously characterized Agrippina as a second Messalina (61[60].33.2^{1}). Later his Julia Domna enters the typology when she is said to strive for power after the murder of her son Caracalla, and to plan to put herself on the same level as Semiramis and Nitocris (79[78].23.3).[74] The case is different for Domitian, since he is biologically connected with two good emperors, his father Vespasian and his brother Titus. Dio hence puts emphasis on proving this natural genealogy to be meaningless: Domitian is, as we have seen, constantly distanced from his father and brother.

Dio's strategy of deconstruction, by which he creates his own typologies and challenges official imperial genealogies, offers an alternative to the constructions of contemporary emperors. His form of deconstruction of imperial representation implies that the Severans are not like the Antonines with whom they associate themselves. They rather appear as close to the emperors of the first century: Dio's Commodus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus are not like Augustus and Marcus Aurelius, but like Caligula, Nero, and Domitian.

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70 For Sulla as a negative *exemplum* in Cassius Dio used by Septimius Severus see Urso 2016; Rantala 2016, 170–172.

71 On the discourse on clemency in Severan times see Rantala 2016, 168–170.

72 On the role of Caracalla for Elagabalus' dynastic legitimacy cf. Gleason 2011, 69.

73 Boudicca's use of this genealogy is hence another example of the intrusion of the narrator upon one of his characters, as discussed on p.211–215. See also Adler 2011, 151.

74 On Julia Domna's interest in Semiramis cf. Moscovich 2004, 366.

Conclusion to Part 3

Cassius Dio's mode of deconstruction of imperial representation, of the emperor's image as he himself, those close to him, and others construct it in certain areas such as military actions, buildings programmes, and divinity, is closely intertwined with the socio-political discourses of the early third century. His portraits of Nero and Domitian cannot, therefore, be studied in isolation, but have to be analysed as part of his large-scale historiographical work, which was written under the Severans (chapter 6). The *Roman History* fits in well with literary trends of the time and is strongly influenced by contemporary history (chapter 6.1). It shows a clear interest in depicting imperial representation and in presenting it as transgressive, as we can see, for example, from Dio's treatment of honours offered to emperors and proto-imperial figures (chapter 6.2).

Imperial representation is deconstructed, i.e. dismantled and framed negatively, by literary strategies which can be divided into five groups focusing on different aspects of imperial actions: the aspect of action and social norm; of action and character; of the combination of several actions; of the choice of actions to be presented; of actions and emotions. We find these strategies of deconstruction throughout the imperial narrative, both in the epitomized sections, which have to be studied with caution, and in the sections that have survived in full (chapter 7). Several narratological and rhetorical techniques form part of this process of deconstruction in Cassius Dio, as has been analysed in detail above. As regards these strategies, Cassius Dio does not lag behind Tacitus. A first strategy of deconstruction concerns an imperial action or form of representation that neglects a social norm. The negative connotations of neglected social norms are applied to forms of imperial representation throughout the work: they appear as foreign and unmanly, as hubristic and directed against nature, and as not funny, but crazy—thus opposing possible humorous interpretations of transgressive forms of imperial representation, such as Nero's wedding with Sporus and Domitian's funeral banquet (chapter 7.1). Second, imperial actions are deconstructed by the creation of persuasive characters for bad emperors. Characterization makes certain forms of imperial representation plausible, and the actions depicted are in turn used for explicit characterizations. Contrasts with other figures—in Nero's case with Boudicca, Corbulo, Tiridates, and Vindex, in Domitian's case with Vespasian, Titus, and Decebalus—or comparisons triggered by the identity in place or time of actions help to sharpen the picture of the characters. The device of focalization adds further plausibility to the deconstructed portrait: it presents the emperor's motives (which appear in part to be more important than his

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actions) and provides different points of view on him, for example, the views of his relatives, the people, and contrasting figures (chapter 7.2). Third, Dio deconstructs imperial representation by combining several imperial actions. This may concern actions by an emperor that are in disproportion to the trivial motive that prompted to them, to their costs, to the social inversion they entail, or to themselves: the emperor's behaviour is often depicted as contradictory. The technique of combination may become effective through disposition: actions can be presented in an amplifying, manipulative way or in a persuasive order that suggests logical connections where only temporal ones are given. Temporal order is less important for the rubrics Dio presents, which resemble Suetonian ordering structures (chapter 7.3). Fourth, imperial representation is deconstructed by the choice of elements used to present imperial actions and forms of representation in the text. Dio selects his material carefully, as we can see from his treatment of catalogues: catalogues of bad imperial deeds may be included, refused, or hinted at by a selection of individual elements of the (potential) catalogue. In focusing on the imperial role Dio selects the role of the performer for Nero and the role of the military autocrat for Domitian as most suitable for criticism. In general, material forms of imperial representation are more rarely selected for deconstruction than performative ones, because the latter are regarded both as more important and as easier to control by the text. An extreme form of selection is the omission of either certain pieces of information altogether, or of their details and circumstances, although in the case of epitomized parts of the text such omissions can only be postulated, not proven (chapter 7.4). A fifth strategy of deconstruction concerns imperial actions and emotions: Dio depicts an atmosphere full of emotional dilemmas and fear, which is partly counterbalanced and partly worsened by laughter and ridicule (chapter 7.5).

These strategies of deconstruction are applied to emperors throughout the whole principate, which creates typologies of bad emperors and influences the communicative memory of Dio's time (chapter 8). Nero and Domitian are part of these typologies since they recall earlier emperors, mainly Tiberius and Caligula, and foreshadow contemporary emperors, mainly Commodus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus (chapter 8.1). As an integral part of such a typology the memory of Nero and Domitian is 'hot memory': it assigns new meanings to them that are relevant to the new discussion about imperial representation in the early third century, of which Dio's historiography is an important medium (chapter 8.2). As part of this discussion Dio's typologies offer an alternative reading to contemporary genealogies. Dio thereby challenges the official Severan imperial representation (chapter 8.3).

PART 4

Suetonius: Deconstruction and Entertainment

Introduction to Part 4

This part Four of the book studies the deconstruction of Nero's and Domitian's imperial representation, their imperial image as created by themselves, their entourage, and others, in fields such as military actions, building programmes, and divinity, in Suetonius' biographies and inquires how and why Suetonius' strategies against Nero and Domitian differ from the strategies applied by Tacitus and Cassius Dio. The inclusion of explicitly positive material on the two bad emperors makes Suetonius' text ambiguous. With reference to the biographical structure of the text I will argue that this ambiguity is a creative literary feature: Suetonius' form of deconstruction, i.e. his way of re-shaping positive or neutral images of Nero and Domitian, builds on historiographical deconstruction on the one hand, but aims at entertainment on the other. It shares this purpose with another contemporary discourse in which it participates, namely the miscellany and encyclopaedic literature of the imperial period.

This analysis of Suetonian deconstruction draws on historiographical deconstruction, but the comparison of the three authors does not depend on chronology: Cassius Dio wrote three generations after Suetonius, and the relationship of Suetonius' *Caesares* and Tacitus' larger works—especially the *Annals*, the main work that allows us to study Tacitean deconstruction—remains unresolved.[1] The comparison is rather between the works' structures and strategies, which will help to bring out the specific character of each mode of deconstruction. Throughout the analysis, Nero and Domitian (and for the latter the text is again much shorter) will be at the centre of the analysis, but other *Lives* will be drawn on too. The inclusion of passages from the *Lives* of other bad emperors such as Caligula and Tiberius and of good emperors such as Vespasian and Titus avoids an isolated reading of only two *Lives*.[2] The interpretation of Suetonius' deconstruction of imperial representation proposed here will also offer a new way of understanding the quality of this work, which has been evaluated very variously.[3]

1 For different scholarly positions see e.g. Townend 1967, 88–89 (Suetonius did not use Tacitus as a source); Wardle 1998, 431 (Suetonius was able to draw on the *Histories*, but the relationship with the *Annals* is unclear); Bowersock 1998, 206 ("In all probability Suetonius was writing at the same time as Tacitus was at work on his *Annals* and covering much of the same material.").

2 I have used the edition of Kaster 2016 as well as the translations of Edwards 2000 and Hurley 2011, also for paraphrases, and current Loeb translations of other authors.

3 On the history of Suetonian scholarship see Galand-Hallyn 1991 and in addition Poignault 2009. See also p.271.

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Chapter 9 briefly introduces the structure of the Suetonian text that has elicited these diverse judgements, which is important for understanding the relationship between Suetonius' rubric system and the presentation of imperial representation. Suetonius' rubrics are small text entities with headwords and labels such as *crudelitas*, *luxuria*, *pietas*, *habitus*, *forma*, *expeditiones*, which suggest how to read the material presented. They are not in chronological order. Their disposition is rather flexible and depends on the structure as well as the effect and emphasis aimed for in each biography. How this rubric structure makes biographical deconstruction distinct from historiographical deconstruction is explored in chapter 10. That chapter is in three parts. I first discuss the use of historiographical strategies comparable to those of Tacitus and Cassius Dio in Suetonius by referring to the results of the previous chapters on the historiographers. This makes it possible, second, to highlight techniques that depend more on the specific genre and structure of Suetonius' biographies. The difference between Suetonius and the historiographers is here partly a difference of degree. But some techniques of deconstruction are also (almost) exclusive to Suetonius and are very typical of his rubric system. They are also the justification for why we can still speak of 'deconstruction' in Suetonius' case. Third, I will focus on ambivalent techniques in Suetonius that weaken deconstruction, on features that do not allow for—or do not aim at—deconstruction in the full historiographical sense. This ambiguity is not a weakness of the author, but a stimulus for the reader. I will argue that Suetonius' biographies do not present fixed images of emperors. They allow for several voices about the emperors to be heard and for tensions between different interpretations to arise. Chapter 11 offers an explanation for this ambivalent use of historiographical strategies in Suetonius. It reads Suetonius not in relation to Tacitus and Cassius Dio, but to Pliny the Elder and Aulus Gellius, and positions Suetonius not (only) within the historiographical discourse but within the discourse of knowledge and entertainment typical of miscellany literature.

CHAPTER 9

Biography and Eccentric Representation

1 Structure and Criticism: Current Debates on Suetonius

Suetonius, who wrote his works as a contemporary of Tacitus under the emperors Trajan and Hadrian at the beginning of the second century, is the inventor of Roman imperial biography. His twelve *Lives* from Julius Caesar to Domitian have both entertained and informed centuries of readers. They were models for later authors such as Marius Maximus (third century), a contemporary of Cassius Dio, and even Alcuin at the court of Charlemagne. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance Suetonius was admired as the biographer par excellence. In contrast to this high estimation, modern scholarship has judged him very variably.[1] On the one hand, some scholars of Ancient History and Latin Literature deny that he is to be seen as a real historian or successful writer.[2] On the other hand, this negative image of Suetonius, which was mainly formed at the beginning of the twentieth century, has been challenged since the 1950s by a much more positive evaluation, initiated by Wolf Steidle.[3]

Suetonius may have commented on the literary form of the *Caesares* at the beginning of his work, which is lost. The characteristic feature of the *Caesares* is the presentation of the material in a mixture of narrative passages, which in general observe chronology, and thematically structured rubrics, which he calls *species* (*Aug.* 9). Suetonius explains this structure of his biographies: he wants to follow the characteristic elements of an emperor's life (*partes*) one by one (*singillatim*) not chronologically but by topics (*neque per tempora sed per species*); by this method the characteristic elements of life are to be presented and perceived more distinctly (*quo distinctius demonstrari cognoscique possint*)

1 Baldwin 1983 is still helpful and a good starting point for the traditional questions of scholarship on Suetonius. Such questions concern genre, sources, chronological order of the twelve *Lives*, form and date of publication, relationship with Suetonius' other works, esp. the *De viris illustribus*. See also the lucid review of Baldwin 1983 and Wallace-Hadrill 1983 by Bradley 1985.

2 This estimation has been influenced mainly by the works of Macé 1900; Leo 1901; Funaioli 1931. See also Paratore 1959; Dihle 1987. More recent scholarship points out that Suetonius did not aim to offer historiographical narratives and should therefore not be judged by historiographical standards; see e.g. Gascou 2001, 159: "Suétone n'a jamais prétendu offrir à ses lecteurs un récit historique" (= Gascou 1984, 801); cf. Gascou 2001, 164 on Suetonius as "un écrivain qui n'a jamais pensé écrire des ouvrages d'histoire".

3 See Steidle 1951/^{2}1963.

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(*Aug.* 9). There is no strict scheme applied to all the *Lives*. But especially the beginning of a *vita* up to the start of the reign and the final section that depicts the events surrounding an emperor's death are given in chronological order. In other passages, the material is presented under rubrics that illustrate several aspects of the emperor and his imperial representation (such as the emperor as military leader, the emperor's building endeavours), and positively or negatively evaluated patterns of behaviour, the virtues (*virtutes*) and vices (*vitia*) of his character.[4] The vices that Suetonius selects as rubrics coincide to a high degree with the well-established characteristics of the rhetorical tyrant, which are *vis*, *superbia*, *libido*, *crudelitas* or *saevitia*, and *avaritia*.[5]

Though the distinction between chronological passages and rubrics may seem clear, the two kinds of disposition also overlap. The elements of a single rubric may be given in chronological order, as within the Neronian rubric *crudelitas*/*saevitia*,[6] which starts with family murders in chronological order (*Ner.* 33–35). Also, the order of several rubrics may follow chronology.[7] Two rubrics on Domitian's vices for example, *saevitia* (*Dom.* 10–11) and *cupiditas* (*Dom.* 12.1–2), are presented chronologically: Suetonius' Domitian declined into cruelty more rapidly than into greed (*et tamen aliquanto celerius ad saevitiam descivit quam ad cupiditatem*, *Dom.* 10.1). Furthermore, chronological or narrative passages sometimes contain rubrics. Thus Nero's last days and his death are presented in chronological order (*Ner.* 40–49), but nonetheless the presentation includes rubrics (e.g. *contumeliae* in *Ner.* 45.2; portents in *Ner.* 46).

Several scholars consider this manner of literary presentation to be inappropriate or bad, or even claim no literary technique is applied at all.[8] Other scholars, by contrast, assert that Suetonius has and follows a clear literary purpose and strict literary principles.[9] Connected with this manner of literary presentation are two much discussed topics of scholarship. First, Suetonius' presenta-

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4 On Suetonian structure see Hurley 2014 (on rubrics Hurley 2014, 22–23), who points out that the scheme of disposition developed in the *Life* of Augustus is varied greatly in the other *Lives*, in her opinion with varying degrees of success (and least successfully in the case of emperors with shorter reigns). On Suetonian *virtutes* and *vitia* cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 142–174; on the topics of rubrics and virtues and vices see e.g. Lambrecht 1995, 512–513.

5 For these characteristic vices of tyrants see Dunkle 1971, 15.

6 On *crudelitas* and *saevitia* as tyrannical faults see Dunkle 1971, 14–15: both terms denote cruelty, but *saevitia* additionally carries the aspect of animalistic ferocity, hysteria, or maniacal sadism.

7 There is also a natural connection between chronological order and some rubrics, for example when Julius Caesar's life is depicted in the sequence of the *cursus honorum* (*Iul.* 5–23).

8 See e.g. D'Anna 1954; Döpp 1972; Flach 1972. Mouchova 1968 takes a middle position.

9 See e.g. Gugel 1977; Baldwin 1983; Pausch 2004.

tion of his material raises the question of how neutral and objective we should consider his work to be. Does the author present his material with the neutrality of an erudite collector and scholar?[10] Or does he—at least implicitly—make or suggest ideological and political judgements?[11] Second, Suetonius' manner of presentation brings up the question of the influences on his work. While forms of Hellenistic biography have long been considered decisive, Roman factors, especially Roman rhetoric, have increasingly been analysed in recent studies too.[12] I will argue that Suetonius presents a highly rhetorical but non-political form of literary deconstruction of imperial representation.

2 Rubrics and Representation: Fragmentation and Re-contextualization

The rubrics that Suetonius uses already in the first biography, of Julius Caesar, reappear in other *Lives*. They can be grouped together to form longer sections. A first, more official section of rubrics (*Iul.* 37–44.3) presents among other things triumphs, spectacles, (re-)organization of the state, administration/jurisdiction. A second part (*Iul.* 45–75) deals with Julius Caesar's *forma*, *habitus*, *cultus*, *mores*, *civilia et bellica studia*, as announced at *Iul* 44.4. Most rubrics (e.g. *spectacula*, *crudelitas*, physical appearance) feature in the majority of the biographies. However, the choice of rubrics, their exact labels, and their disposition are adapted to the individual emperors: Nero's biography has a rubric on positive deeds, which is structured according to the virtues *pietas*, *liberalitas*, *clementia*, and *comitas* (*Ner.* 9–10), as well as *spectacula* (*Ner.* 11–13), consulships (*Ner.* 14), legal acts (*Ner.* 15–17), and 'foreign politics' (*Ner.* 18–19.2). It is followed by a section on negative deeds, which is divided into *probra* (*Ner.* 20–25) and *scelera* (*Ner.* 26–38). The *probra* (*Ner.* 20–25) include the rubrics musical activity (*Ner.* 20–21.2), acting (*Ner.* 21.2–3), chariot-driving (*Ner.* 22.1–3), and Nero's journey to Greece (*Ner.* 22.3–25). The *scelera* (*Ner.* 26–38) are structured according to vices, namely *petulantia* (*Ner.* 26–27), *libido* (*Ner.* 28–29), *luxuria* (*Ner.* 30–31), *avaritia* (*Ner.* 32), and *crudelitas* and *saevitia* (*Ner.* 33–38). After the narrative section on Nero's death Suetonius presents the rubrics on outward appearance (*Ner.* 51), education (*Ner.* 52), desire for popularity (*Ner.* 53–55), and religion

10 See e.g. Ektor 1980; Wallace-Hadrill 1983; Sonnabend 2002.

11 See e.g. Lossau 1975; Cizek 1977; Bradley 1991; Lewis 1991; Barton 1994; Konstan 2009 (cf. Konstan 2009, 455–457 for further references); Tatum 2014, 166.

12 See e.g. Baldwin 1983; Wallace-Hadrill 1983; Lewis 1991, who studies similarities between Suetonius' text and Cicero's speeches.

(*Ner.* 56). In Domitian's *Life*, the four rubrics that are positive for him consist of four contexts of imperial representation, settings in which an emperor's image is shaped: *spectacula* (*Dom.* 4), *opera* (*Dom.* 5), *expeditiones* (*Dom.* 6), and administration (*Dom.* 7–9, including the virtues *clementia* and *abstinentia*). The negative aspects are later rubricized as vices: *saevitia* (*Dom.* 10–11), *cupiditas* (12.1–2), and *arrogantia* (*Dom.* 12.3–13).

We can see from this brief overview of the *Lives* of Nero and Domitian that topics of imperial representation overlap with rubrics to a high degree: there is often a rubric on military actions (*Iul.* 57–70; *Aug.* 20–24; *Tib.* 16–20; *Calig.* 43–46; *Claud.* 17; *Dom.* 6), on building endeavours (*Iul.* 44.1–3; *Aug.* 28.3–31; *Calig.* 21; *Claud.* 20; *Ner.* 16.1; *Vesp.* 8.5–9.1; *Tit.* 7.3; *Dom.* 5), and on *spectacula*/entertainment (*Iul.* 39; *Aug.* 43–45; *Calig.* 18–20; *Claud.* 21; *Ner.* 11–13; *Tit.* 7.3; *Dom.* 4).[13] But some topics of imperial representation can appear in other rubrics too: Domitian's decree concerning vine planting is mentioned among positive acts of administration (*Dom.* 7.2) but also in the narrative leading up to his death (*Dom.* 14.2). Aspects of representation may also be scattered, as is indeed most often the case, through different rubrics, as well as through other text passages dealing with, for example, the ascent to power or the circumstances of death. While Caligula receives a rubric on his claim to be divine (*Calig.* 22), Nero's representation as god and his relationship with the gods is not dealt with under a single rubric. Rather, we learn at different places that he wishes to perform as a god (*Ner.* 53) and that he despises all cults (*Ner.* 56).[14] Domitian's divinity is addressed when his golden and silver statues are mentioned as acts of arrogance (*Dom.* 13.2). The alleged closeness of the historical Domitian to the goddess Minerva has been turned into distance in the text: as we will study later, shortly before his death Minerva is depicted as leaving Suetonius' Domitian in his dream (*Dom.* 14.3). Some rubrics also present material that is indirectly connected with imperial representation, for example the rubrics on appearance and health, or on sex life, which is treated under headwords such as *libido* or *pudicitia* (*Iul.* 49–52; *Aug.* 68–71; *Tib.* 43–45; *Calig.* 23–25; 36; *Claud.* 33.2; *Ner.* 16; 28–29; *Galb.* 22; *Oth.* 2.2; 3; *Vit.* 12; *Vesp.* 21–22; *Tit.* 7; *Dom.* 22).[15]

13 Gellius (Gell. *NA* 9.7.3) mentions a work of Suetonius *On games*, cf. Jones 1996, 35, and p.344–345 on Suetonius' *Pratum*. On *spectacula* in Suetonius in general see Bradley 1981, 136, who points out that Suetonius uses spectacles to evaluate an emperor's liberality and responsibility towards his subjects.

14 Nero's lack of reverence for the gods is also criticized in non-biographical discourse. See p.86–88; 192, and the Pseudo-Senecan *Octavia* (89; 240–241; 912–913), cf. Cordes 2017, 130–131.

15 Krenkel 1980 illuminates the commonplace nature of the reproaches made in these sections.

When single elements of imperial representation are mentioned in rubrics of virtues or vices, they appear as an example of the respective virtue or vice. We have just seen that the golden and silver statues of Domitian are used to prove his *arrogantia* (*Dom.* 13.2). Nero's *domus aurea* proves his *luxuria* (*Ner.* 31). Also, a whole rubric on imperial representation may be used to illustrate a certain vice or virtue, for example when Augustus' *spectacula* (*Aug.* 43–45) form part of the bigger section on his *liberalitas* (*Aug.* 41–45).

Suetonius' rubrics have a clear rhetorical background: both the rubrics that consist of topics of imperial representation and the rubrics on virtues and vices are influenced by the rhetorical concept of *loci a persona*. The *loci a persona* provide a pool of topics for an orator who has to speak about a person, and help him to find positive and negative attributes. Such lists of character traits and personal qualities are given by the Auctor ad Herennium (*Rhet. Her.* 3.6.10), by Cicero (*Inv. rhet.* 1.34–36), and by Quintilian (*Inst.* 3.7.10–25). The Auctor ad Herennium distinguishes between external circumstances (*res externae*), physical attributes (*corpus*), and qualities of character (*animus*) as sources for how to talk about a person.[16] External circumstances include descent, education, wealth, kinds of power, titles to fame, citizenship, friendships (*genus, educatio, divitiae, potestates, gloriae, civitas, amicitiae*), and the like, as well as their contraries. Physical attributes are agility, strength, beauty, health (*velocitas, vires, dignitas, valetudo*), and their contraries. Qualities of character, finally, are wisdom, justice, courage, temperance (*prudentia, iustitia, fortitudo, modestia*), and their contraries. *Topoi* like these are necessary for all characterizations in speeches of, for example, an accused person—especially when one has to argue that a certain person did or did not commit a certain crime (in the *status coniecturalis*)—or an adversary in both juridical and political cases. The *loci a persona* are also outstandingly helpful if someone is to be praised, and so for encomiastic speeches. Thus, by drawing on rhetorical *loci a persona* the genre of biography shares an important technique with encomiastic literature[17] and with its opposite, invective.[18]

16 I am following the translation of Caplan 1954.

17 Biography and encomium are closely intertwined in classical antiquity, cf. Woodman 2014, 1 with reference to Tacitus' *Agricola* (and to Cic. *Att.* 1.19.10), the laudatory (cf. Tac. *Agr.* 1.4; 46.2) biography of his father-in-law. That Suetonius draws on techniques that are also used when writing an encomium does not imply that his biographies are to be read as encomia. Cf. Enenkel 2003, 170, who points out that Suetonius' *Life of Augustus* does not share much with an encomium.

18 Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 144 on the influence of regal and imperial panegyric. Barton 1994, 50–51 discusses the influence of and parallels with imperial panegyrics (e.g. Pliny) and invective (e.g. Cicero's attacks on Marc Antony and Verres, see Barton 1994, 53) and stud-

The system of various different rubrics, which is influenced by rhetorical *loci a persona* and topics of imperial representation, leads to a specific form of presenting imperial representation. It can be described by the two complementary techniques of fragmentation and re-contextualization.[19] A piece of information about imperial representation is taken out of its chronological narrative context and put into a certain rubric. This technique has been criticized as Suetonius' *Zettelkastenverfahren*.[20] It is thereby separated from its original significance, and may even be left with no significance at all. Within its rubric it is embedded into a new context, from which it receives its meaning and to which it attributes meaning at the same time. To put it differently, the rubric would not exist without its single elements and the single elements would read differently in another rubric (or narrative context). This is why the same form of imperial representation can be presented and evaluated differently: both Nero and Domitian re-named months to make their own names more prominent in the calendar. But this same act of imperial representation is interpreted as typical of their specific behaviour: in Nero's case it is listed in the rubric on his longing for eternity and perpetual fame (*Ner.* 55), while in Domitian's case it is part of the rubric on arrogance (*Dom.* 12.3–13).

To study one example of fragmentation more closely, we can see that Nero's journey to Greece (*Achaia*), which combined several forms of his imperial representation, is split up into several pieces in Suetonius. The depiction of this journey is not included in the remaining Tacitean *Annals*. Cassius Dio presents it as the climax of Nero's representation as artist and Nero's refusal of the role of emperor, and uses it as an opportunity for severe criticism (62[63].8.1–62[63].12.1).[21] Suetonius mentions the journey to Greece explicitly in four different contexts. It features first in a positive section on Nero's foreign politics (*Ner.* 18–19.2), which lists two journeys. But at that point the only detail given about this journey is Nero's plan to cut a canal through the Isthmus, which he puts into practice himself (*tubaque signo dato primus rastello humum effodit et corbulae congestam umeris extulit*, "and when the trumpet gave the signal,

ies the invective character of the depiction of Nero's cruelty in Suetonius (see Barton 1994, 55–56).

19 Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 13 speaks similarly of "dissolution" and "reconstitution": "Suetonius' characteristic process is analysis; the dissolution of narrative into fragments, and their reconstitution under heads of analysis."

20 The lack of chronological order and the decontextualization it entails are among the main points of criticism against Suetonius advanced by historical scholars, see e.g. Flach 1972, 275–278; 285 using the term *Zettelkastenverfahren*, 'filing cabinet' method, literally referring to boxes of index cards (*Zettelkasten*).

21 See Schulz 2014, 409–413.

he was the first to strike the earth with his mattock and to carry off a basketful on his shoulders", *Ner.* 19.2). The same scene of Nero starting the work at the Isthmus is taken up in the rubric of *crudelitas* (*Ner.* 33–38): the fact that he did not mention the senate (*dissimulata senatus mentione*) while he inaugurated the Isthmus project is here interpreted as hostility towards the senatorial order (*Ner.* 37.3). The second explicit mentioning of the journey to Greece falls under the rubric of Nero's *probra* (*Ner.* 20–25), in which the journey constitutes its own sub-rubric (*Ner.* 22.3–25). This part is closest to Cassius Dio's version, as it also shows Nero indulging in being a singer, actor, herald, and charioteer. Third, another aspect of the journey is presented in the rubric on Nero's *crudelitas* (*Ner.* 33–38), which includes the murder of Agrippina. We learn here that after the matricide and during his trip to Greece Nero did not dare to attend the Eleusinian mysteries, from which, as a herald pronounces, criminals and the impious are banned (*Ner.* 34.4). The last time this journey comes up is under the rubric on Nero's outward appearance: while travelling through Greece, so Suetonius, Nero grew his hair, which was always piled up in tiers, even down to his neck (*ut comam semper in gradus formatam peregrinatione Achaica etiam pone verticem summiserit, Ner.* 51).

Suetonius was thus interested in four different aspects of Nero that were connected to this trip: the Isthmus project, Nero's representation as artist, Nero's fear or bad conscience after murdering his mother, and Nero's hairstyle. These four fragments are put into different contexts, which makes us read them in the way determined by each rubric. The Isthmus project is to be considered a positive element of Nero's foreign politics (*Ner.* 19.2), but its inauguration process is also interpreted as a sign of Nero's hostility towards the senate (*Ner.* 37.3). His artistic representation in Greece (*Ner.* 22.3–25) is a kind of summary, which takes up and brings together all the elements mentioned before, and is the climax of his *probra* (*Ner.* 20–25). Nero's behaviour as regards the Eleusinian mysteries, which are here connected to the murder of Agrippina (*Ner.* 34.4), makes the version of Nero killing his mother more plausible, and provides an argument for his *crudelitas* (*Ner.* 33–38). His hairstyle is mentioned in the context of other elements of his physical appearance of which he should have been ashamed, in order to demonstrate his unacceptable appearance (*Ner.* 51). We can see from this example of Nero's trip to Greece that Suetonius' rubric system has a crucial influence on his way of deconstructing imperial representation. The relationship of rubric and deconstruction will thus be at the centre of this analysis of Suetonius.

CHAPTER 10

Strategies of Deconstruction in Suetonius

1 Historiographical Techniques in Imperial Biographies

1.1 *Artistry and Arrogance: Historiographical Traits of Suetonius' Nero and Domitian*

Although Suetonius does not write historiography, he shares some of the techniques that are used by Tacitus and Cassius Dio to deconstruct imperial representation, i.e. to interpret it in a negative way reacting to other, positive or neutral interpretations. His focus of criticism about Nero and Domitian is the same as that found in the historiographical works: Suetonius too sets emphasis on Nero's representation as an artist and on Domitian's (autocratic) arrogance.[1] We also find the same main differences between the two emperors that we know from the historiographical discourse. While Nero is depicted as quixotic and as not understanding or not wanting to take up the role of emperor, Domitian overdoes his interpretation of the imperial role. While Nero is criticized for following his artistic interests more and more openly, Domitian is depicted as an isolated person and as a bad military leader. Suetonius' text structure, with its combination of rubrics and narrative passages, offers different ways to present these points of criticism. This section gives an overview of how Suetonius integrated the main historiographical points of criticism—Nero's artistry and Domitian's arrogance—into his biographies.

In a rubric on public criticism of Nero, Suetonius gives examples of graffiti that concentrate on Nero's matricide and the death of Claudius, his representation as Apollo, the *domus aurea*, and his enmity to the senate (*Ner.* 39.2–3). In his own work, Suetonius focuses on Nero the artist. After the *divisio* in *Ner.* 19.3, which clearly separates the neutral and positive aspects of his reign from the negative ones, there follow two rubrics on Nero's vices, *probra* (*Ner.* 20–25) and *scelera* (*Ner.* 26–38). While the *scelera* are structured according to standard reproaches against tyrants (*petulantia, libido, luxuria, avaritia, crudelitas*), the *probra* section is a genuinely Neronian one. It is not divided into several vices or different topics of imperial representation but is completely dedicated to forms of Nero's representation as an artist, which are arranged in a mixture of

1 For the imperial representation of Nero and Domitian in historical, panegyrical, and historiographical discourse see chapter 3.

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chronological, spatial, and—mainly—thematic order. The section starts with a rubric on music (*Ner.* 20–21.2), which shows how Nero increasingly indulges his musical interests. The following rubric is not clearly separated from that on music, but is loosely added to it: the *dubitavit etiam an* in *Ner.* 21.2 forms the transition from Nero's ambitions as a lyre-player to his performances as an actor (*Ner.* 21.2–3). As the third element of Nero's artistic interests Suetonius presents his passion for horses and chariot-driving, which he felt from his early youth (*ab ineunte aetate, Ner.* 22.1). This rubric on chariot-driving (*Ner.* 22.1–3) shows a development in Suetonius' Nero similar to that found in the rubric on music: he turns a passive, playful enthusiasm into active performance (*Ner.* 22.1), and he follows his passion ever more openly and more often (*Ner.* 22.1–2). These three rubrics—music, acting, chariot-driving—reappear in the depiction of the journey to Greece (66 CE), which now follows (*Ner.* 22.3–25). More than the three preceding sections this depiction of the journey emphasizes the clash of Nero's imperial role and his personal passions (*Ner.* 23.1): when he is told by his freedman Helius that the affairs in Rome require his presence, he is not willing to fulfil the role of emperor. He rather wants Helius to wish that he come back to Rome worthy of a Nero ("*… optare potius debes, ut Nerone dignus revertar*", *Ner.* 23.1). Speaking of himself in the third person Suetonius' Nero is starting to create a type out of himself. He turns himself into a figure that he prefers to the figure of the emperor. In the triumph that he holds after his return from Greece, traditional military elements are replaced by artistic elements, for example displaying his victory crowns instead of booty and the names of the artists he defeated and the titles of his songs and dramas instead of the names of the foes and details of the battles (*Ner.* 25.1–2).

The clash between Nero's own idea of his role and the role of emperor is emphasized again later, in the narrative passage about Nero's final weeks and death (*Ner.* 40–49).[2] The passage opens with the statement that the world had endured such a *princeps* for almost fourteen years, but now finally could endure him no longer: *talem principem paulo minus quattuordecim annos perpessus terrarum orbis tandem destituit* (*Ner.* 40.1). With Nero's end stated already here at the beginning of the death narrative, the passage concentrates completely on Nero's behaviour, not on the events themselves. This final passage is structured according to time and space and shows how Suetonius' Nero becomes altogether an artist. The possible loss of his power, we learn, would allow him to become solely an artist and to find an excuse to play the cithara, which

2 Cf. Lounsbury 1991, 3755: "It is at the death that the theme of Nero the performer, self-conscious, obsessed with appearance and applause, is played out to the fullest."

was pleasing to him as an emperor, but would be necessary for him if he were just a private citizen (*principi sibi gratam, privato necessariam*, *Ner.* 40.2). Here, shortly before his death he again talks of himself as a type, when he laments that his shameful life is unbecoming to a Nero (*"vivo deformiter, turpius pereo.* οὐ πρέπει Νέρωνι, οὐ πρέπει …", *Ner.* 49.3). In preparing and styling his own death he has finally become an artist and solely an artist, saying repeatedly "What an artist I am in my dying!" (*"qualis artifex pereo!"*, *Ner.* 49.1).[3]

Just as the typical criticism of Nero, namely his artistry, is brought together in its own section on *probra* (*Ner.* 20–25) at a significant position in the *Life*, Domitian's arrogance has its own rubric too (*Dom.* 12.3–13). The vices of the *princeps* Domitian are in three rubrics: *saevitia* (*Dom.* 10–11), *cupiditas* (*Dom.* 12.1–2), and *arrogantia* (*Dom.* 12.3–13). While *saevitia* (or *crudelitas*) and *cupiditas* (or *avaritia*) are standard rubrics of bad emperors (cf. *Tib.* 49; 57–62; *Calig.* 27–35; 38–42; *Claud.* 34; *Ner.* 28–29; 33–38; *Galb.* 12–13), *arrogantia* as a rubric is exclusive to Domitian. It is styled as the opposite of the virtue of *civilitas*.[4] Its position as the climax of the vices, directly before the passage on Domitian's death, gives it additional emphasis. The rubric includes, among other things, the famous *dominus et deus* reproach, his statues on the Capitol and vaulted passageways and arches, Domitian's seventeen consulships, and his name *Germanicus* and the renaming of the months September and October to *Germanicus* and *Domitianus* (*Dom.* 13.2–3). The examples given by Suetonius illustrate Domitian's intention to elevate his own autocratic position and a wish for his presence to be felt throughout the city and the empire. Domitian's arrogant forms of representation do not come as a surprise to the reader. Already at the beginning of the *Life* Suetonius states that Domitian showed the character traits that became typical of him as emperor even before he was *princeps*: Suetonius' Domitian made full use of his power, so he had already demonstrated what kind of man he would be later (*Dom* 1.3). This arrogance is accom-

3 I am not following Champlin 2003, 51, who argues that *artifex* here does not mean "artist" but "artisan" and that "Nero is drawing attention to the contrast between the great artist he once was and the pitiful artisan he has become". Suetonius' Nero is artist and still sees himself as artist at the end of his life. Furthermore, Suetonius does not use the word *artifex* in the sense of "artisan" but always with reference to someone who is accomplished in his art. These are mostly performance arts: *Iul.* 84.4 (*tibicines et scaenici artifices*); *Ner.* 20.1 (*generis eius artifices* on voice artists); *Vesp.* 18 (*poetas nec non et artifices*); *Tit.* 7.2 (*artifices saltationis*). *Calig.* 32.1 (*miles decollandi artifex*) cruelly refers to the art of beheading someone.

4 For a positive rubric on (*clementia* and) *civilitas* see Suet. *Aug.* 51–56: Augustus refuses, e.g., temples dedicated to himself alone (*Aug.* 52), and golden statues (*Aug.* 52), and does not like to be addressed as *dominus* (*Aug.* 53).

panied, as it is in historiography, by his isolation.[5] Domitian prefers his own company (*secretum sibi horarum sumere solebat*, *Dom.* 3.1; *solus secreto deambulabat*, *Dom.* 21).

Although Domitian's military success is dealt with in a rubric positioned in the part of the *Life* devoted to Domitian's positive aspects (*Dom.* 6), there are statements scattered throughout the biography that follow historiography in deconstructing Domitian's ability as a military leader.[6] Domitian is characterized as unsuitable for war: he is lazy, cowardly, and passive during the Capitoline War (*Dom.* 1.2–3).[7] He either does not participate in war (*Dom.* 6.2), or shows himself to be *laboris impatiens* and prefers to be carried in a litter when on the march or in battle (*Dom.* 19.1). He takes the wrong military actions; his campaigns are unnecessary (*Dom.* 2.1). The idea of Domitian's simulation as a fundamental character trait that is connected to his (fake) military achievements is not fully developed in Suetonius.[8] We do not find in Suetonius the accusation that Domitian staged bogus triumphs (Tac. *Agr.* 39.1; Tac. *Germ.* 37.5; Plin. *Pan.* 11.4; 16.1–3; 17.4; Cass. Dio 67.4.1; 67.7.4). But Domitian is said to have simulated modesty and an enthusiasm for poetry before his own accession to power (*simulavit et ipse mire modestiam, in primisque poeticae studium*, *Dom.* 2.2).[9] We also learn that he fulfilled his political functions only in title (*titulo tenus*, *Dom.* 1.3; 13.3).[10]

Suetonius' Nero and Domitian are not at first sight extremely different from Tacitus' and Cassius Dio's versions. But the way in which Suetonius focuses

5 On the isolation of the Suetonian Domitian see also Hulls 2014, 180–184.

6 Cf. the depiction of Caligula as an unsuitable military leader (*Calig.* 43–49).

7 Depictions of Domitian's behaviour during the Capitoline War are inconsistent when we compare Suetonius to Tacitus or even within Tacitus, cf. Jones 1996, 17. Panegyrical literature praises Domitian's conduct during the war, cf. Jones 1996, 15 and Mart. 9.101.13–14 (*adseruit possessa malis Palatia regnis, / prima suo gessit pro Iove bella puer*, "he freed the Palatine held under evil dominion, and as a boy waged his first war for his Jupiter"); Stat. *Theb.* 1.21–22 (*defensa prius vix pubescentibus annis / bella Iovis*, "earlier yet, Jupiter's warfare warded off in years scarce past childhood"); Stat. *Silv.* 1.1.79 (on *bella Iovis*); Sil. *Pun.* 3.609 (*nec te terruerint Tarpei culminis ignis*, "and the burning of the Tarpeian temple cannot alarm you").

8 Cf. p.334–338 on historiographical strategies that do not feature in Suetonius or that feature much less than in historiography.

9 Simulation as a character trait is more important for Suetonius' Tiberius (*Tib.* 42.1; 57.1). For a positive evaluation of Domitian's poetic endeavours see Jones 1996, 23 and Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.91: Domitian's poetry is said to have been of the highest quality, but Domitian's care for the world kept him from writing poetry (*ab institutis studiis deflexit cura terrarum*).

10 This may be read as an inversion of a panegyrical topic: the opposite assertion, namely that people fulfil their office not only in title or on the surface, is used to praise Neronian times in Calpurnius Siculus (Calp. *Ecl.* 1.69–71).

on certain eccentric aspects of imperial representation differs from historiography. The system of rubrics allows for clear emphases through headwords or labels and through the specific position of a certain rubric, which will be dealt with in detail later.[11]

1.2 *Marking Transgressions*

In Suetonius, too, Nero's artistry and Domitian's arrogance can be understood as transgressions of accepted forms of imperial representation. In historiographical works both Nero and Domitian are criticized for their transgressions of social conventions and norms, moral and erotic behaviour, limits of place and time, and their hubris, when they assimilate themselves to the gods rather than to humans.[12] This criticism may be based on the quality or quantity of forms of imperial representation, for example regarding the kind or amount of honours they ask for or accept. It may be expressed explicitly or implicitly.

The evaluation of imperial representation as breaching boundaries is also important in Suetonius, although the transgressions are in general not marked as clearly as in historiography. In the very first biography, there is a section on Julius Caesar's transgressions (*Iul.* 76–79).[13] It encompasses examples of Caesar's misuse of power and possible reasons for his murder (*ut et abusus dominatione et iure caesus existimetur*, *Iul.* 76.1), and collects instances of his *licentia*, *inpotentia*, *arrogantia*, and the *infamia affectati regii nominis*.[14] This section clearly shows which elements of imperial representation Suetonius regarded as transgressions. Some of them reappear in—or are important for—the *Lives* of Nero and Domitian: excessive honours (*honores nimios*, *Iul.* 76.1), such as a statue displayed with those of the kings (*statuam inter reges*, *Iul.* 76.1); honours that were greater than is right for mortals (*ampliora etiam humano fastigio*, *Iul.* 76.1), such as a golden seat in the senate house, statues placed besides those of gods, a couch such as gods have, and the renaming of a month after his name (*sedem auream in curia …, simulacra iuxta deos, pulvinar, … appellationem mensis e suo nomine*, *Iul.* 76.1).[15] Caesar is said to have conducted his third and fourth consulship in name only (*titulo tenus*, *Iul.* 76.2). Such transgressions have

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11 See p.303–314.

12 On the motif of transgression of imperial representation in both panegyric and historiography see p.36–37.

13 For the figure of Julius Caesar triggering reflections about transgressive behaviour in Cassius Dio see p.186.

14 Cf. Steidle ^{2}1963, 57.

15 Suetonius' Tiberius refuses to enact several of these transgressions at the beginning of his reign (*Tib.* 26–32), such as setting up statues of him among statues of the gods, renaming the months after his names (*Tib.* 26.1–2), and calling himself *dominus* (*Tib.* 27).

become programmatic by Suetonius' Caligula. In the rubric about his lavishness (*Calig.* 37) we learn that, regarding his expenses, especially for buildings, he abandoned all reason (*omni ratione posthabita*, *Calig.* 37.2) and that his motivation was mainly to achieve something that was said to be impossible (*nihil tam efficere concupiscebat quam quod posse effici negaretur*, *Calig.* 37.2). In this context, even spending money on the people is coded as absurd (*Calig.* 37.1), since Suetonius' Caligula does it only to get rid of the money. Suetonius' Nero is set into this tradition of lavishness when he is said to have admired his uncle most for spending in so brief a period the enormous fortune that Tiberius had left him (*Ner.* 30.1; cf. *Calig.* 37.3). Similarly to his uncle Caligula he defines himself by his capacity to transgress existing boundaries when he states that he is the first *princeps* to know what he is allowed to do (*negavit quemquam principum scisse quid sibi liceret*, *Ner.* 37.3).[16]

Suetonius depicts transgressions in different contexts of imperial representation. The transgression of Julius Caesar regarding representation as divine is typical of bad emperors, and may serve as an example of how Suetonius marks transgressions. It is one of the main reproaches against Caligula, effectively placed first in the section on him as a monster (*de monstro*, *Calig.* 22.1). Nero is on the one hand depicted as an emulator of the gods: he is said to have planned to emulate the achievements of Hercules, and is motivated to do so because people say that he has already equalled Apollo in singing and Sol in chariot-driving (*Ner.* 53). On the other hand, he robs the gods of their temples' ornaments and statues, which is depicted as the climax of his *avaritia* (*Ner.* 32.4). Domitian's hubris is illustrated in the rubric on his arrogance (*Dom.* 12.3–13). He has silver and golden statues of himself of a particular weight—a privilege for statues of gods—set up on the Capitol (*statuas sibi in Capitolio non nisi aureas et argenteas poni permisit ac ponderis certi*, *Dom.* 13.2).[17] When he takes back his wife after the divorce he calls her back to his divine couch (*revocatam eam in pulvinar suum*, *Dom.* 13.1). The best known reproach regarding divine forms of imperial representation is that Domitian accepted the designation, both in written and spoken form, of *dominus et deus* (*Dom.* 13.2).[18] In the amphitheatre, he and Domitia are called *dominus* and *domina* (*Dom* 13.1).[19]

16 Cf. Nero on his power in the *Octavia*: *Fortuna nostra cuncta permittit mihi* ("my good fortune gives me licence to do anything", 451); *inertis est nescire quid liceat sibi* ("it is indolent not to understand what one can do", 453).

17 Cf. *Aug.* 52 (with Augustus being against golden statues).

18 Cf. the corresponding refusal of Augustus (*Aug.* 53) and Tiberius (*Tib.* 27). Without the combination with *deus*, the term *dominus* (master) is more innocent. Suetonius, for example, has a rubric on Augustus' conduct as *patronus dominusque* (*Aug.* 67).

19 On the term *dominus* in panegyrical discourse see Cordes 2017, 223–231.

In accordance with his superior attitude and behaviour as master or even god of his people, Suetonius' Domitian constructs clear boundaries, especially in communication: already in his youth he is so impolite (*ab iuventa minime civilis animi*) as to reject the kiss of his father's concubine (*Dom.* 12.3); instead of communicating with his people when they voice a wish during the Capitoline competition, he orders them to be silent (*Dom.* 13.1). Domitian's communication appears very unbalanced and one-sided, and controlled by his power and hubristic self-image. When Suetonius states that Domitian distanced himself from his literary interests when he became emperor, this reads as though Domitian had retracted a transgression that he was no longer allowed as emperor (*Dom.* 2.2). However, Suetonius codes this potentially positive action in a negative way, by claiming that Domitian had only feigned his interest (*Dom.* 2.2).

Transgressions are sometimes made explicit by the narrator. Nero's *luxuria* is described as knowing no limit: *nec largiendi nec absumendi modum tenuit* (*Ner.* 30.2). The *domus aurea*, which also figures in the *luxuria* rubric, is described as massive in all its dimensions (*Ner.* 31.1–2).[20] Its lake resembles a sea surrounded by buildings which are like whole cities. Nero considers only this enormous palace as adequate when he says that he can now finally start to live like a human: *ut se diceret quasi hominem tandem habitare coepisse* (*Ner.* 31.2). In the rubric on Nero's cruelty we learn that he shows no restraint in killing people after the Pisonian conspiracy and the conspiracy of Vinicianus, no *modus interimendi* (*Ner.* 37.1). During his journey in Greece Nero breaches several boundaries with regard to the artistic competitions. He not only changes their dates in order to make them fit into one year, he even changes the content by adding a musical competition to the Olympic games (*Ner.* 23.1). The latter action is explicitly termed as *praeter consuetudinem*, as against all precedent (*Ner.* 23.1).

The narrator also has figures within the stories point out the imperial transgressions, for example in the context of Nero's artistry and in the context of Domitian's buildings. Singing in tragedies, Nero breaches certain boundaries of his imperial role. Wearing the masks of heroes and gods, or even heroines and goddesses, he sings, for example, as Canace giving birth, Orestes the matricide, Oedipus blinded, and Hercules insane (*Ner.* 21.3). Nero's masks are, according to Suetonius, similar to his own facial traits and to those of the woman he was in love with at the time (*personis effectis ad similitudinem oris sui et feminae prout quamque diligeret*, *Ner.* 21.3). He is thus breaching the boundaries of theatre and reality by merging the two.[21] In an anecdote reported by

20 Size is a positive feature of Nero's and Domitian's imperial buildings in panegyrical discourse, see Cordes 2017, 59–101.

21 Cf. Bartsch 1994, 47 on this passage in Suetonius: "The implication of these comments is

Suetonius (*fama est*) the boundary-breaking is made explicit by a recent recruit who tries to set the emperor free when he sees him laden and bound with chains, as the scene—in the *Hercules Insanus*—demands (*Ner.* 21.3).[22] Suetonius uses the story, even if it is completely invented, to code Nero's performances as breaking the boundaries that an emperor should keep, and which are still the boundaries assumed by a simple soldier, who reacts to what is happening on stage as though it were reality.[23] While in this story the soldier's behaviour illustrates a transgression, someone in the narrative about Domitian demands a limit upon him and his building endeavours (*Dom.* 13.2). Generally, tyrannical building endeavours are often connected to the idea of excess or immoderateness, as we have already seen in the passage on Caligula's irrational lavishness (*Calig.* 37.2–3). Tyrants cross social and natural boundaries when forming public space. Suetonius gives a positive counter-example when discussing Augustus' *continentia* (*Aug.* 72–73).[24] By contrast, Domitian's passageways and arches are presented as arrogant because of their size, their number, and their distribution throughout the whole city. This exceeding and crossing of spatial boundaries is explicitly marked by someone who writes the word "*APKI*" (i.e. the Greek *arkei*), "it is enough", on one of them: *ianos arcusque cum quadrigis et insignibus triumphorum per regiones urbis tantos ac tot extruxit ut cuidam Graece inscriptum sit APKI* (*Dom.* 13.2). Domitian's own images are mentioned again later, when Suetonius discusses the reactions to Domitian's death and tells of senators tearing down his shields and images (*Dom.* 23).[25] Here again, figures in the narrative realize the transgression and try to oppose it.

Suetonius' Nero and Domitian are both also depicted as using innovations, which can be considered as transgressions of established forms of imperial

that Nero, who was already seen as reproducing his life on the stage, did so at an inescapably visual level as well and almost *inflicted* the equation of his persona with his tragic roles upon the audiences at these plays."

22 The same anecdote is briefly mentioned by Cassius Dio, 62(63).10.2, see p.231–232.

23 Bartsch 1994 has accordingly analysed the transgression here as a reciprocal transgression or confusion of reality and theatre, cf. Bartsch 1994, 49: "Suetonius' interest in this incident seems rather to stem from the recruit's reaction to the spectacle precisely as the mark of an inability to remain wholly within one of two possible interpretative frames, the reality-frame or the theater-frame. Instead, the man's understanding of what is transpiring onstage merges the two categories of representation and reality, as indeed Nero's mask itself does."

24 Suetonius describes Augustus' palace as small, modest, and without any luxury, naming some things that it lacked, such as marble decoration (*Aug.* 72.1).

25 On the mutilation and destrution of the historical Domitian's portraits and the removal of his images see Varner 2004, 112–115; 125–134.

behaviour, in a negative way.[26] The emperor's behaviour is not often marked explicitly as innovation, but there are two stories that explicitly mark sexual transgressions as innovative: after Nero had polluted almost every part of his body, he finally invented a new kind of game (*novissime quasi genus lusus excogitaret, Ner.* 29). In this game he disguised himself as an animal and attacked the private parts of men and women who had been tied to stakes (*Ner.* 29). Innovation here becomes a means to achieve complete *impudicitia*. Domitian uses innovation as a means of *saevitia*. He makes use of a new form of interrogation (*novo quaestionis genere*) that consists in a new kind of torture: fire is inserted onto the victims' genitals (*immisso per obscaena igne*) (*Dom.* 10.5).

As in historiography, some of the emperor's transgressions are not his own responsibility only. He is also offered certain honours by the senate or the people, which he either declines or accepts. His reaction is then used to evaluate his behaviour. In Suetonius, Nero's reaction to honours is either neutral or even positive.[27] On the first day of his principate the young Nero receives boundless honours. He refuses only the title "Father of the Fatherland" because of his age: *ex immensis quibus cumulabatur honoribus tantum patris patriae nomine recusato propter aetatem* (*Ner.* 8). He wants to accept the senate's votes of thanks only after he has deserved them (*cum meruero, Ner.* 10.2). However, we have just heard that his wish to equal Hercules is inspired by people who think that he already equals Apollo and Sol (*Ner.* 53).[28] These people are here made responsible for Nero's hubris indirectly—the sentence is in the passive voice ([*Nero*] *existimaretur, Ner.* 53). Suetonius' Domitian is passionate about new and unprecedented honours; he refuses one of them offered to him by the senate, namely that whenever he held the consulship Roman knights, chosen by lot, should precede him wearing the *trabea* and with lances, along with his lictors and attendants (*Dom.* 13.3). But he does so only because of his fear (*Dom.* 13.3), which frames the potentially positive refusal of this honour negatively.

1.3 *Strategies of Negative Coding*

We have seen that some of Suetonius' emperors make transgressions a part of their self-image. Suetonius depicts these transgressions in different contexts,

26 The technique is, again, not confined to the depiction of Nero and Domitian. Caligula's new taxes, the innovation of which is underlined by two adjectives (*vectigalia nova atque inaudita, Calig.* 40.1), are connected to his need for money caused by his luxury (cf. *exhaustus, Calig.* 38.1).

27 Cf. also *Tib.* 9.2 (where Suetonius is neutral regarding an innovative honour); *Tib.* 26.1 (where Tiberius is applauded for accepting only a few and moderate honours).

28 For passages in panegyrical discourse that associate Nero with Apollo see e.g. Sen. *Apocol.* 4.1.22–23; Calp. *Ecl.* 7.83–84.

makes them explicit himself, or has figures in the text notice them. He also uses innovations of emperors and their reactions to honours offered to them to bring out their transgressions. In addition to marking transgressions Suetonius uses historiographical strategies to code an element of imperial representation negatively. In the previous section we have already studied instances of behaviour that is characterized as hubristic and transgressive. Three other techniques will be discussed next which are also applied in the historiographical discourse and which are used to increase the plausibility of the account given: the attribution of single negative qualities to an emperor's conduct (i.e. as being crazy, unmanly and foreign, not funny, and too expensive); the presentation of his reasons and his motivation as inappropriate; and the ascription of antisocialness to his behaviour. The following brief analysis is based on the strategies of deconstruction used by Tacitus and Cassius Dio.[29] For Suetonius they function not as sources but as background foils, as strategies that were theoretically possible. Thereafter, we will discuss historiographical strategies of deconstruction that we have analysed in Tacitus and Cassius Dio that are *not* fully developed in Suetonius.[30]

1.3.1 Negative Connotations: Mad, Unmanly and Foreign, Not Funny, and Too Expensive

The reproach that deconstructs an emperor's behaviour and actions in the broadest sense is to claim that he was crazy. Everything he does is then considered to be the product of a sick mind. Suetonius reproaches Caligula emphatically with mental illness. In the rubric on his health (*Calig.* 50.2–3) he attests the instability of both his physical and mental health: *valitudo ei neque corporis neque animi constitit* (*Calig.* 50.2). According to Suetonius, Caligula himself realized the poor state of his mental health (*mentis valitudinem et ipse senserat*, *Calig.* 50.2), which he explained as an illness of his brain that had to be cured (*deque purgando cerebro cogitavit*, *Calig.* 50.2). His behaviour is explicitly evaluated as mad (*in furorem verterit*, *Calig.* 50.2), being perhaps the result of a love potion given to him by his wife, which was meant as medicine. The following rubric on Caligula's *confidentia* and *metus* (*Calig.* 51) explains these two contradictory character traits conveniently by his mental illness just noted (*non inmerito mentis valitudini attribuerim diversissima in eodem vitia*, *Calig.* 51.1).[31] No other *Life* makes such an explicit link between mental illness, which

29 For these strategies in Tacitus and Cassius Dio see chapter 4 and 7.

30 On p.334–338.

31 Caligula's mental illness makes the section *Calig.* 50–52, which is otherwise parallel to *Iul.* 45–47, very individual. Cf. Steidle ^{2}1963, 85: "Im übrigen entspricht die Reihenfolge ‚äußere

is even explained physiologically, and imperial behaviour. Suetonius' Claudius, however, when he hears and decides cases, sometimes resembles someone who is insane (*amentique similis*, *Claud.* 15.1). Suetonius' Nero picks up on a tradition that considered Claudius mad, when he treats his decisions as though they were taken by a mad person (*ut insipientis atque deliri*, *Ner.* 33.1). Nero himself is not depicted as mad, but rage at least, *furor*, manifests itself in his expenditures (*ad hunc impendiorum furorem*, *Ner.* 31.4). Domitian is not directly reproached with madness either. As in historiography, the reproach of madness is made against bad emperors—more than in Tacitus, less than in Cassius Dio[32]—but it is not the predominant one.

Among the techniques that attribute negative connotations to imperial representation, the ascription of unmanliness and foreignness stands out. Before Nero, both Julius Caesar and Caligula are reproached for unmanliness. Julius Caesar has to hear the insult that he is a woman several times (*Iul.* 22.2; 49.2; 52.3). Caligula dresses up in female style, or as a god (*Calig.* 52). Domitian is accused of being a passive homosexual—which was considered highly unmanly—as a young boy, driven by the poverty of his youth (*Dom.* 1.1). It was indeed the official (though incorrect) Flavian version that the Flavians had lived in poverty under the Julio-Claudians.[33] Suetonius follows this, but turns it against Domitian. By claiming that poverty made Domitian prostitute himself he re-codes this poverty as a negative element of Domitian's biography, but not that of Vespasian or Titus. This poverty is later used again to explain Domitian's greed (*Dom.* 3.2; cf. 12.1–2).

The reproach of unmanliness and foreignness is directed with more emphasis against Nero and takes two main forms: Nero's artistry is characterized as something both foreign and unmanly; and Nero is shown as not accepting the boundaries of gender. Nero's desire to sing is clearly associated with foreignness, primarily with Greekness: the proverb by which he legitimizes his performances ("hidden music has no admirers") is Greek (*Graecum proverbium iactans occultae musicae nullum esse respectum*, *Ner.* 20.1). His first performance takes place in Naples (*Ner.* 20.2), a Greek city. There Nero speaks Greek when he promises to sing after a drink (*aliquid se suffritinniturum Graeco sermone promisit*, *Ner.* 20.2). His performances are accompanied by Alexandrians, remarkable for their (un-Roman) anointed hair, their exquisite appearance,

Erscheinung, Gesundheit, Kleidung' in Cal. 50–52 genau Caes. 45–47, ist aber im einzelnen völlig individuell gestaltet, vor allem dadurch, daß *confidentia* und *metus* im Zusammenhang mit der geistigen Erkrankung dargestellt werden."

32 See, e.g., Cass. Dio 62(63).14.2 for Nero and 67.4.3–4 for Domitian, cf. p.197.

33 Cf. Jones 1996, 12–13.

and their rhythmic applause (*Ner.* 20.3). When Suetonius states next that Nero wanted to sing (not only in Naples but) even in Rome (*etiam Romae, Ner.* 21.1) he points out the un-Romanness of Nero's activity as singer once more. Rome should not have a singing emperor. And the true home of his artistic endeavours remains Greece, as Nero's journey to Greece (*Ner.* 22.3–24.2) clearly illuminates. Greece is, again, marked as a place different from Rome (*Romae …, Achaiam …, Ner.* 22.3). Nero's desire to travel there to perform is motivated by Greek cities which organized musical competitions and which had awarded and sent him all the victory crowns for singing to the cithara (*Ner.* 22.3). Suetonius' Nero not only invites to dinner the messengers who brought these prizes, but also sings for them at their request and claims that only the Greeks know how to listen and that only they are worthy of him and his art: *solos scire audire Graecos solosque se et studiis suis dignos ait* (*Ner.* 22.3). His eagerness finally to get to Greece and sing there is underlined by claiming that he did not delay his departure (*nec profectione dilata*)[34] and that he immediately (*statim*) started to sing as soon as he reached Cassiope in Greece (*Ner.* 22.3). In the rubric on Nero's bodily features (*Ner.* 51) Suetonius includes Nero's hairstyle during this journey in Greece: his above-mentioned curled, long hair assimilates his appearance to Apollo Citharoedus.[35]

When Nero sings in tragedies wearing the masks of heroes and gods both male and female (*Ner.* 21.3), he transgresses the boundaries of gender. But Neronian femininity is not confined to his artistry. His clothing style, when he wears an unbelted tunic (*Ner.* 51), is also unmanly.[36] This breaking of gender (and even sex) boundaries is shown most distinctly in the *libido* rubric: Nero turns the boy Sporus into a woman and dresses and treats him like an empress (*Ner.* 28.1–2). The Sporus episode corresponds to the Doryphorus episode, which is also part of the *libido*-section (*Ner.* 29).[37] Nero acts as a bride for Doryphorus, just as Sporus had been the bride for him (*sicut ipsi Sporus, Ner.* 29). In both 'marriages' Nero has the manly bride—Sporus in the first, himself in the second episode—transgress sexual and gender boundaries.

34 This historical inaccuracy (Nero's journey cannot have been spontaneous, see Kierdorf 1992, 189) is a literary feature designed to highlight Nero's impatience.

35 Cf. Kierdorf 1992, 231. See also Bradley 1978, 284–285 for Suetonius' inaccuracy concerning Nero's hairstyle.

36 For this tunic as a "highly coloured robe worn at dinner at the Saturnalia" see Warmington 1977, 115.

37 In Suetonius, the name "Doryphorus" must be a mistake for "Pythagoras", see Champlin 2003, 161.

In the case of Sporus it has been argued that Nero's behaviour was meant as a joke.[38] Nero may have thought it hilarious to unman a boy and call him "semen". That he presents him around the Sigillaria, where the Saturnalia, a festival involving transvestism, take place, may be read as supporting this interpretation. If this was really meant as a joke it was certainly a cruel one. But the fact that Suetonius does include it in the rubric of *libido* (and not a possible rubric on humour, cf. *Vesp.* 22–23), opposes a reading of this episode as funny. Similarly, Domitian's statement that he called his wife back to his divine couch (*in pulvinar suum*, *Dom.* 13.1) might well have been understood as a joke.[39] But integrating it into the rubric of *arrogantia* prevents such a positive reading. If we follow these lines of thought, Suetonius indirectly deconstructs possibly humorous actions as not funny. He does so directly when he states that Nero's nocturnal adventures may have been for his own amusement—funny for him—but were a disaster for others (*vicos vagabatur ludibundus nec sine pernicie tamen*, *Ner.* 26.1). With his vices growing stronger, Suetonius' Nero gives up jokes and disguises (*iocularia et latebras omisit*) and moves on to greater misdeeds (*Ner.* 27.1).

In addition to the characterization of certain elements of imperial representation as unmanly and foreign as well as not funny, Suetonius depicts several aspects as too expensive, often in the rubric of *luxuria*. In the narrative, Nero's high expenses are linked to his greed, closely connecting the rubrics of *luxuria* and *avaritia*. Nero's expenses (*Ner.* 30–31) drive him to robbery (*Ner.* 32.1), just as Caligula's *sumptus* (*Calig.* 37) had turned him *ad rapinas* (*Calig.* 38.1), and as Domitian's debts incite his *cupiditas* (*Dom.* 12.1–2). In Suetonius, the claim that an emperor's action or behaviour has been too expensive often turns a form of representation that had been mentioned positively before into an ambivalent form of representation.[40]

1.3.2 Imperial Reasons

Like the historiographical narrators, Suetonius mentions and evaluates several reasons, for example on Augustus' motives for choosing Tiberius as a successor (*Tib.* 21.2–7), or Tiberius' retiring to Rhodes (*Tib.* 10.1–2). He presents himself as a thorough analyst of imperial reasons and constructs imperial reasons similarly to the historiographers. An emperor's actions are made plausible

38 I am picking up an idea of Champlin 2003, 149–150, who mentions the name Sporus and the location of the Sigillaria as part of the cruel joke. For the story in Cassius Dio, who also opposes a humorous reading, see p.195–196.

39 Cf. Jones 1996, 107.

40 See the examples discussed on p.331–332.

by things he said (*Ner.* 38.1), or by temporal connections that invite us to see causal relations between two actions. So when Nero is said to have married Poppaea twelve days after the divorce from Octavia, the explicit mentioning of the short period of twelve days suggests that Nero indeed divorced Octavia because he already wanted and planned to marry Poppaea, whom he, as the sentence continues, loved extraordinarily: *Poppaeam duodecimo die post divortium Octaviae in matrimonium acceptam dilexit unice* (*Ner.* 35.3). The need for money often serves as a motivation for bad actions. As just mentioned, Nero's *luxuria* is presented as the reason for his *avaritia* (*Ner.* 32.1). Similarly the alleged reason Suetonius gives for Domitian's *cupiditas* is that he had exhausted his funds (*exhaustus operum ac munerum inpensis stipendioque quod adiecerat*, *Dom.* 12.1). From a historical viewpoint, this is not true.[41] However, in the text, it serves as an explanation for Domitian's rapacious behaviour and so makes his actions appear more plausible. When Suetonius claims, for example, that Domitian had Epaphroditus killed because people thought that he had helped Nero with his suicide (*Dom.* 14.4), the reason constructed by the narrator associates Domitian with his predecessor, from whom he tried to distance himself.

In the deconstruction of imperial reasons by the narrator we find three strategies similar to those in historiography:

(1) Suetonius simply claims that the official reasons were wrong. Often this is done by adding the adverb *quasi* to the official reason: Nero killed Antonia on the false ground that she was planning a plot (*quasi molitricem novarum rerum interemit*, *Ner.* 35.4), the real reason being, so Suetonius, that she did not want to marry him after the death of Poppaea (*Ner.* 35.4). The same official reason, a plot, is unmasked as false—without presenting an allegedly true reason—in the case of Salvidienus Orfitus and Acilius Glabrio, whom Suetonius' Domitian sends into exile *quasi molitores rerum novarum* (*Dom.* 10.2). Domitian takes back his wife after he had left her, because he could not stand to be alone, so Suetonius. The official reason—that the people urged him to take her back—is, again, marked as wrong by the adverb *quasi* (*quasi efflagitante populo*, *Dom.* 3.1). It complements this strategy that official reasons that do not suit Suetonius' depiction of an emperor may simply be left out. Domitian is depicted as taking Domitia Longina away from her husband in order to have her as his own wife (*Dom.* 2.1). This serves as an example of Domitian's misuse of power already in

41 See the arguments in Jones 1996, 100–101 with the conclusion: "Suetonius' *exhaustus* is a myth." (Jones 1996, 101). See also Charles 2002, 24–25, with further references, on Domitian's alleged financial problems as historically wrong.

the time before his own principate. Suetonius does not mention, however, that Domitia was the daughter of Corbulo, the famous general and victim of Nero, and that Domitian's marrying her created an ostensible distance from Nero, which was in line with Flavian propaganda.[42]

(2) Suetonius makes reasons for imperial behaviour seem inappropriate, trifling, and trivial, mostly by presenting them only briefly or as fragments of more elaborate reasons. For at least some reasons mentioned we can assume that they seem so trivial precisely because they are presented as fragments. Suetonius does so especially in the rubrics on *saevitia* and *crudelitas*, when he gives reasons for punishments that Caligula, Nero, and Domitian carried out.[43] Thus, Suetonius' Nero has his stepson, the young son of Poppaea, killed because he played "General and Emperor" (*Ner.* 35.5). Suetonius' Domitian has a pupil of the actor Paris killed, although he is still a boy and very ill, because he resembles his teacher in his art and his looks (*quod arte formaque non absimilis magistro videbatur*, *Dom.* 10.1). An author called Hermogenes of Tarsus is killed because of some allusions in his "History", and the punishment is extended to his slave copyists (*propter quasdam in historia figuras*, *Dom.* 10.1).[44] A man who said in the arena that a Thracian might be a match for the *murmillo* but would not measure up to the gamesgiver, thereby accusing Domitian of being partial and against the Thracian gladiators was dragged from his seat and thrown to dogs in the arena, wearing a tag that said that he was a friend of the Thracians who had spoken disrespectfully of the emperor (*Dom.* 10.1). The alleged irrelevance of a reason can also be stated directly. Before Suetonius lists Domitian's reasons for killing senators he explicitly characterizes them as extremely trifling (*levissima … de causa*, *Dom.* 10.2).[45] He thus determines how the reader interprets the reasons and forestalls any way of taking them seriously.

(3) Suetonius makes an emperor's reasons appear as only personally and not politically motivated. When receiving messengers Nero clearly prefers the ones from Greece who hand over victory crowns as awards for the cithara competition to him (*Ner.* 22.3). The messengers are even welcomed to his private dinner

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42 Cf. Jones 1996, 18.

43 For the empty reasons given for Domitian's behaviour in the *saevitia*-rubric (*Dom.* 10–11) see Schulz 2018, 312–315.

44 This provides a sharp contrast with Vespasian's clement reaction to allusions by lawyers (*causidicorum figuras*, *Vesp.* 13).

45 For the historical background see Jones 1979, 86: "only a very small percentage of his 600 senators are known to have been executed, and for reasons that were no doubt more convincing than Suetonius' incredible suggestions".

parties. Suetonius' Nero uses his power as emperor to achieve his artistic successes (esp. *Ner.* 23.2–24.2). His reason for killing the actor Paris in Suetonius is his wish to get rid of a rival.[46] This murder is included in the rubric on Nero's wish for *popularitas* and eternal fame (*Ner.* 54). It is telling for this technique of 'personalizing' imperial reasons that Cassius Dio also gives a very personal reason for Nero's behaviour, but quite a different one: in Cassius Dio Nero's reason for killing Paris is that he wanted to learn dancing from Paris but did not have the capacity to do so (62[63].18.1).[47] For this strategy of deconstruction it is not important what exactly the reason was, but to show that it was a personal one, unconnected to the role of emperor. Similarly, Domitian's military representation is deconstructed when Suetonius states at the beginning of the biography that Domitian was mainly motivated by his desire to equal Titus and not by the necessity of military endeavours (*expeditionem quoque in Galliam Germaniasque neque necessariam et dissuadentibus paternis amicis incohavit, tantum ut fratri se et opibus et dignatione adaequaret*, "he embarked upon a campaign in Gaul and the German provinces, although it was unnecessary and his father's friends advised against it, merely to be equal with his brother in wealth and status", *Dom.* 2.1).

1.3.3 Antisocialness

Several examples of imperial representation that are deconstructed in Suetonius have already shown that in biography too the behaviour of Nero and Domitian runs counter to the paradigms of Roman social life. I would like to highlight four aspects of imperial antisocialness in Suetonius that he shares with the historiographers. First, Nero's and Domitian's transgressions of social boundaries are diametrically different from each other. While Nero cannot stand to be alone and needs people and an audience by his side (*impatiens secreti*, *Ner.* 20.2), Domitian is, as mentioned above, depicted as preferring social isolation (*Dom.* 3.1; 21). Without making it explicit, Suetonius here criticizes extreme social conduct of either kind. Second, imperial behaviour is directed against the emperor's subjects and not in support of them. When Suetonius' Nero assigns offices to people, he advises them to achieve the result that no one own anything anymore (*nulli delegavit officium ut non adiceret, … "hoc agamus, ne quis quicquam habeat"*, *Ner.* 32.4). When he sings while Rome burns he is wearing his well-known stage attire. His aesthetic preferences for the flames imply insens-

46 We find the same motif in Ps.-Lucian *Nero* 10, where Nero is said to have had the vocal chords of a tragic actor whom he envied cut out.

47 See p.217.

itivity towards the suffering of the people: *laetusque "flammae", ut aiebat, "pulchritudine" Halosin Ilii in illo suo scaenico habitu decantavit* ("delighted with, as he said, 'the beauty of the flames' and, dressed in his stage attire, he sang of 'the Fall of Troy'", *Ner.* 38.2). Third, antisocialness is connected to innovations and new forms of behaviour. As in the examples of transgressive innovation mentioned above, innovative antisocialness can effectively be linked to sexual reproaches, for example when Tiberius is said to have installed the new office *a voluptatibus* (*Tib.* 42.2). Nero's own *libido* leads to a new acceptance and new system of norms, when he forgives people's faults if they confess their sexual misdeeds, because he strongly believes that no one is truly chaste and that many were only concealing their vices (*Ner.* 29). Fourth, a new system of social norms can be depicted as the inversion of the old, accepted one. Thus, during his banquets Suetonius' Nero has respectable Roman women imitate tavern women (*Ner.* 27.3). By praising Caligula most for his lavishness (*Ner.* 30.1), Suetonius' Nero implicitly turns something into a virtue that should be regarded as a vice.

1.4 *Off the Rubric: Nero's and Domitian's Death Narratives and the Function of Space*

Like the historiographers, Suetonius shows an interest in death scenes. Death scenes in general are used to illuminate the character of the person dying.[48] Suetonius similarly treats the death of figures such as Britannicus or Agrippina, but especially of the emperors themselves.[49] Such death scenes of emperors in Suetonius are part of consecutive sections of narrative that come closer to the structure of historiographical works than the rubrics that present certain virtues and vices. They do not focus only on the moment of death itself, but include the days before death and the events leading up to it. This explains the length of these passages: Nero's death narrative takes up around one fifth of the whole biography (*Ner.* 40–49), Domitian's one seventh of the whole *Life*

48 This is also a Tacitean or Roman historiographical technique, cf. Bérard 2007, 246; see also Garson 1974, 27–28 on (communal and) individual death scenes in Tacitus: "Tacitus is always scrupulous to make the manner of death harmonise with traits of character already depicted."

49 Suetonius' Vespasian, for example, pronounces that an emperor has to die standing, shortly before he himself dies trying to stand up (*Vesp.* 24). For Suetonius' death scenes bringing out the character of the dying person see Lounsbury 1987, 64: "So we find the importance of a man's demeanor in his last moments as a test of his character". See Steidle ^{2}1963, 92 on Suetonius' Nero (and Domitian): "so gibt ähnlich wie etwa bei Domitian gerade die Darstellung des Lebensendes wichtige Einblicke in das Wesen des Kaisers".

(*Dom.* 14–17.2). Especially Suetonius' depiction of Nero's last hours has had several interpreters and has met high approval in scholarship.[50]

Suetonius designs these pieces of continuous narrative as textual entities with specific literary features, in Nero's and Domitian's case even more than for Julius Caesar (*Iul.* 80–83) and Caligula (*Calig.* 56–60), whose deaths are structurally comparable.[51] That a new section begins with the death narrative is easy to recognize in both Nero's and Domitian's *Life*: the beginning is marked in both cases by a statement that refers to everything that was said before under the rubrics. Suetonius states that the world at last cast off Nero after enduring him, a *princeps* of this sort (*talem principem*), for almost fourteen years (*Ner.* 40.1). The pronominal adjective *talis* refers not only to what was said directly before but also to everything mentioned so far. Likewise, the death narrative of Domitian begins by stating that Domitian was *per haec terribilis cunctis et invisus* (*Dom.* 14.1), by this behaviour feared and hated by everyone, with the deictic pronoun *haec* denoting his negative behaviour and actions as depicted so far in the *Life*.[52] In addition to these distinctly marked beginnings, both death narratives have a clear end. They are both followed by a notice on the funeral (*Ner.* 50; *Dom.* 17.3) and a rubric on the emperors' outward appearance (and health)

50 Cf. Timonen 2000, 237 with further references and Townend 1967, 93; 96, who calls the section *Ner.* 47.3–49.1 "perhaps the most successful piece of continuous narrative in the *Caesars*" and Suetonius' "finest consecutive section of narrative". Cf. Frings 1985, 279 ("Abschnitt von besonderer Erzählkunst"). The passage has been analysed from different perspectives: Townend 1967 in his analysis focuses on the depiction as regards vividness and details. He points out "the economy and speed of the Latin" (Townend 1967, 94) and "the mastery of compression and concentration which makes the passage permanently readable and permanently vivid" (Townend 1967, 96). Frings 1985 analyses the same passage with an eye to the motifs of loneliness and reversal, esp. reversal of the *exitus virorum clarissimorum* literature (for which see also Lounsbury 1987, 65). Lounsbury 1987, 71–79 discusses Nero's death in Suetonius as compared to Agrippina's death in Tacitus. He distinguishes two modes in which the two authors achieve their effects (Lounsbury 1987, 76): Suetonius' mode is "sensational", he devotes his attention to the details of a certain situation; Tacitus' mode is "intuitive", he neglects details and focuses on the psychological essence of a certain situation. Cf. Lounsbury 1991, 3755–3756 with a focus on Nero the artist during the death scene. Sansone 1993 argues for a fictitious source, namely the myth of Er in Plato's *Republic*, with Nero resembling the tyrannical Ardiaeus.

51 Pausch 2004, 332 rightly suggests that Suetonius invited his readers to compare the different death scenes of his emperors. On Vitellius' death scene as a narrative piece in Suetonius see Pausch 2004, 301–317.

52 Cf. *Calig.* 56.1 (*ita bacchantem atque grassantem non defuit plerisque animus adoriri*, "while he was running riot and laying waste in this way, most people had the idea to assault him") where the adverb *ita* fulfils the same function at the beginning of Caligula's death narrative as *talis* (*Ner.* 40.1) and *haec* (*Dom.* 14.1).

(*Ner.* 51; *Dom.* 18). Both passages exhibit an interest in the typical narrative element of time and pace, they state the time (*Ner.* 47.1; 47.3; *Dom.* 16.1) or refer to dynamic developments of time (*tempore … appropinquante*, *Dom.* 14.4; *maturavit sibi exitium*, *Dom.* 15.1), and depict the very day of death in detail (*Ner.* 47.3–49.4; *Dom.* 16.1–17.2).

The death narratives pick up and recombine motifs of imperial representation and behaviour, which have been developed in the rubric sections before and are part of the process of deconstruction. In the narrative of Nero's last days and his death several of these motifs reappear, namely his *luxus* (*Ner.* 42.2; cf. 30–31), his *crudelitas* (e.g. *Ner.* 43.1; cf. 33–38) and *avaritia* (e.g. *Ner.* 45.1; cf. 32), as well as the figures Spiculus (*Ner.* 47.3; cf. 30.2) and Sporus (*Ner.* 46.2; 48.1; 49.3; cf. 28–29),[53] and Nero's overall inactivity regarding political issues.[54] The clash between his role as emperor and his self-image as artist is pointed out more clearly than would be possible within a rubric: there are several instances that illuminate Nero's inappropriate artistic reactions to political challenges (*Ner.* 40.2; 41.1; 41.2; 43.2; 44.1; 45.1). Domitian's death narrative picks up his fear as the driving force of his actions (*Dom.* 14.2; cf. 3.2); his edict on the vineyards (*Dom.* 14.2; cf. 7.2); and his cruelty (*Dom.* 15.1; 15.3; cf. 10–11). With the focus in the death narratives being on the behaviour and feelings of the emperors, their main function is to bring out their personalities: Nero's quixotic artistry and Domitian's fear. The differences between Suetonius' Nero and Domitian, the extroverted wish for popularity of the first and the preference for isolation of the latter, is already implicit in the two opening sentences of these passages just mentioned. Looking at them once again, we can see that the precise formulation is telling: Suetonius' Nero is cast off by the whole earth, while Suetonius' Domitian is brought down by a plot by members of his own close entourage (*talem principem … terrarum orbis tandem destituit*, *Ner.* 40.1; *conspiratione amicorum libertorumque intimorum simul et uxoris*, *Dom.* 14.1).

This difference between the two emperors is mirrored in the symbolic function of space in their death narratives.[55] Suetonius' Domitian knows, we learn, about the circumstances of his death. In his youth Chaldaean astrologers had

53 For these passages on Sporus see also Lounsbury 1991, who uses the figure of Sporus in Suetonius' *Nero* to analyse Suetonius' methods of composition.

54 On Nero's inactivity cf. Steidle ^{2}1963, 92–93.

55 The subject of space in Suetonius has not yet been a focus of philological scholarship. Sauron's analysis of the Suetonian depiction of spaces as illustrating transgressions is merely historical: he understands transgression as the deviation from traditional ways or as breaking certain boundaries (both in Rome and outside it) (see Sauron 2005, 451), and analyses Nero's anti-triumph in Suet. *Ner.* 35.1–3 as one example of such a transgression (see Sauron 2005, 455–461).

told him the year, the day, even the hour, and the way he would die (*Dom.* 14.1). In contrast to the time and manner of death, the text (and the prediction of the astrologers) does not determine the site of the murder. Domitian's fear and anxiety get worse the closer the appointed hour approaches (*Dom.* 14.2; *sollicitior in dies*, *Dom.* 14.4), and the emperor reacts to this threat by making the space around him more visible. He has the walls of the porticoes, where he used to walk, fitted with phengite stone so that, thanks to the mirror effect produced by that material, he can see what is going on behind him (*Dom.* 14.4). Domitian's attempt to broaden the perceptible space surrounding him is opposed by a description of space around him that is steadily narrowing (*Dom.* 15.2). Suetonius' depiction suggests that lightning bolts that occur within a period of eight months are searching out the correct place to kill Domitian, and they come closer and closer to him: a first lightning bolt strikes the Capitol, another one the *templum Flaviae gentis*, the next his palace on the Palatine, even his own bedchamber (*Dom.* 15.2). Domitian is already killed symbolically when a storm hits one of his triumphal statues, tears the inscription from its base, and makes the statue fall onto a nearby tomb (*Dom.* 15.2). After the lightning bolts thus determine or define the site of Domitian's murder, he dreams that his favourite goddess Minerva leaves her shrine saying that she can no longer watch over him (*Dom.* 15.3). Suetonius' Minerva symbolically makes space for the murder, which takes place in the bedchamber where Domitian retires after sending everyone away (*summotis omnibus in cubiculum se recepit*, *Dom.* 16.2), and so where he is once again alone in his reclusiveness.

By contrast to Domitian's dying in isolation at the very heart of imperial space, Suetonius describes Nero's death as an event that takes him away from the site of Rome.[56] Space rather than time structures this death narrative. It is first designed as a journey from Delphi (*Ner.* 40.3) to Naples (*Ner.* 40.4) and back to Rome (*Ner.* 41.2). But as the threat gets worse Suetonius' Nero is depicted as leaving his bedchamber and rushing out (*Ner.* 47.3). He is then offered the suburban villa of his freedman Phaon as a hiding-place (*Ner.* 48.1). The journey to that villa, on which he is accompanied by four intimates (*Ner.* 48.1), is styled as a trip from official space to unofficial space: the way leads Nero from the road (*via*) to a byway (*deverticulum*) through thickets and bramble bushes along an overgrown path (*inter fruticeta ac vepres per harundineti semitam*) to

56 The related topics of escape and hiding in this scene have been analysed by Newbold and Timonen: Newbold 1984 considers the leitmotif of Nero's death in Suetonius to be "a constant interplay between hiding and exposure, protection and abandonment" (Newbold 1984, 118); Timonen 2000, 237 reads Nero's death narrative as "an escape story, in the frame of which the emperor escapes both his enemies and reality".

the back wall of the house (*ad aversum villae parietem*) (*Ner.* 48.2–3).[57] In order for Nero to enter the villa, they dig a secret entrance (*clandestinus ad villam introitus*, *Ner.* 48.3). This narrow passage (*per angustias*) finally leads him to a little room (*cella*) (*Ner.* 48.3–4), the last space that we hear about. The preparations made for his suicide, which we hear about next, are constantly interrupted by his saying, as mentioned above, "What an artist I am in my dying!" (*Ner.* 49.1).

The dynamic description of space in Nero's and Domitian's Suetonian death scenes underlines the contrast of their character.[58] Both tyrants die in extremely narrow spaces. But for the isolated autocrat Domitian this space is placed right at the centre of the Empire and he is there alone when the murderers arrive. Nero's *cella* is separated from the emperor's official space. The quixotic artist-emperor was taken there, away from the centre of the Empire, on a trip in which he becomes more and more artist and less and less emperor. The unofficial small space in which he is finally killed—as artist, not as emperor, as he underlines—surrounded and helped by intimates, provides a sharp contrast to his previous existence.

2 Suetonian Techniques: The Effect of Rubrics

2.1 *Character: Points of Comparison*

That some techniques feature differently in Suetonius than in the historiographers arises from his rubric system. To start with character depiction, both Tacitus and Cassius Dio use this device as argument. In a circular form of argumentation, an emperor's character provides reasons or proof for his actions and his imperial representation, while these are in turn the basis for statements about his character. The emperors' character is finally shown not to fit the demands of the imperial role. The argumentative force of character depictions is less prominent in Suetonius than in historiographical works. But it is typical of a Suetonian biography to give a holistic picture of an emperor's personality by presenting rubrics that combine his character (as person and emperor), in the 'virtues and vices' rubrics, with his imperial role and forms of representation, in rubrics on buildings, military endeavours etc. Such external aspects are understood as signs of an emperor's character which can be decoded and

57 For elements in this depiction that recall descriptions of the Underworld see Sansone 1993, 181–183.

58 For the characterizing function of space in narrative see de Jong 2014, 126–127.

interpreted.[59] The structure of Suetonius' *Lives*, with their mixture of rubrics and narrative passages, invites the reader to draw direct comparisons between emperors. It also makes it more convenient to compare certain aspects of their reigns and lives than in historiography, since pieces of information or certain topics are more easily found. Aspects that easily become points of comparison between characters in Suetonius are, as we have already seen, death narratives, as well as a set of five other biographical elements: the general driving forces of a personality; family history; upbringing; behaviour before the principate; and the first things done as *princeps*. These five biographical elements that illuminate an emperor's character in Suetonius will now be analysed in the cases of Suetonius' Nero and Domitian.

(1) To begin with the driving forces of a personality, we can state first that both Nero's and Domitian's character is presented as fixed. Important traits of character do not change, but they develop and become apparent to different degrees depending on external circumstances.[60] Suetonius' Nero conceals his interests less and less (e.g. *Ner.* 20.1; 22.2). Suetonius' Domitian finally turns his virtues into vices, since in addition to his natural character, poverty makes him rapacious and fear makes him cruel: *quantum coniectare licet super ingenii naturam inopia rapax, metu saevus* (*Dom.* 3.2). They both have a driving force that explains their behaviour: the desire for popularity and fame, which is aimed mainly at the common people (*animum vulgi, Ner.* 53), in Nero's case (*Ner.* 53–

59 Cf. Hulls 2014, 193, pointing out the role of physiognomy as the external manifestation and aspect of character.

60 Cf. Müller 1998–1999 on Domitian's unchanging character in Suetonius, refuting Lambrecht 1995, who claims that Domitian's character did not just develop, but changed. Galtier, claiming to follow Lambrecht (see Galtier 2009, 89) in his analysis of Domitian's and Titus' character, however, seems to think more of a development in behaviour than a change in character (cf. Galtier 2009, 92: "L'essentialisme de Suétone implique en effet, dans les deux cas, l'actualisation progressive d'un *ingenium* dont les potentialités sont révélées dès le début de l'existence."). Suetonius' Tiberius, too, shows his natural character more and more and ceases to simulate (*Tib.* 57.1). He exhibits some development in his behaviour, but not a change of character. On the ancient idea of an unchanging character see also Bradley 1991, 3703. Gill challenges the view that antiquity thought of the character as innate and unchanging by pointing out the interest of classical Greek and Hellenistic-Roman philosophy in the development of character and by focusing on another distinction than that of changeable/unchangeable to describe the main difference between ancient and modern ideas of character: while antiquity is interested in making moral judgements about a person's character, modern biographies (at least partly) explore "from the inside, as it were, the narrative of an individual's life, with a view to understanding the special, perhaps unique, character of this life" (Gill 2006, 413 with explicit reference to Gill 1983). Gill, however, focuses not on Suetonius, but on Plutarch (and Tacitus, see p.115–119).

55), and fear in Domitian's case (*Dom.* 14.2; cf. 3.2). Neither Suetonius' Nero nor Domitian show the self-awareness of their own character that Suetonius' Tiberius exhibits (*Tib.* 67).[61]

(2) As regards family history, the differences between Suetonius' Nero and Suetonius' Domitian could hardly be more obvious: Nero's ancestors already foreshadow his vices, whereas Domitian is distanced from his ancestors and their virtues. The biography of Nero starts with the family history of the Domitii, especially the branch of the Ahenobarbi.[62] This is done similarly for the Claudii in the *Life* of Tiberius (*Tib.* 1–4) and the Sulpicii Galbae in the *Life* of Galba (*Galb.* 3), but only in the depiction of Nero's ancestors does a straightforward genealogy emerge, culminating in Nero. In Nero's biography the list of ancestors is quite long and their depiction relatively detailed. Suetonius himself states the reason for his interest in Nero's family history and makes the purpose of this beginning of his biography explicit. By reporting on Nero's ancestors it becomes clearer, so Suetonius, that on the one hand Nero lapsed from the virtues of his ancestors, but on the other hand he reproduced the vices of each one of them as their heir: *pluris e familia cognosci referre arbitror quo facilius appareat ita degenerasse a suorum virtutibus Nero ut tamen vitia cuiusque quasi tradita et ingenita rettulerit* (*Ner.* 1.2).[63] Suetonius here points out that Nero did not follow the good character traits that his ancestors possessed, but displayed their vices. When we read the following passage about these ancestors, we indeed detect several similarities between Nero's ancestors and himself, which are intended to prove Suetonius' assertion independently of their historical accuracy.[64] They take their decisions led by personal motives (see the grandfather of Nero's great-grandfather in *Ner.* 2.1 and Nero's great-grandfather in *Ner.* 3.2, although this is about a reproach of Marc Antony, whom he abandoned for Augustus' side), celebrate incorrect triumphs (see the grandfather of Nero's great-grandfather in *Ner.* 2.1), they are indecisive (see the father of Nero's great-grandfather in *Ner.* 2.3), they are savage and cruel (see the father

61 Tiberius is also aware of the unchangeability of his character: *cum ait similem se semper sui futurum nec umquam mutaturum mores suos quam diu sanae mentis fuisset* ("when he said that, as long as he was of sound mind, he would always be the likeness of himself and would never change his character", *Tib.* 67.3).

62 Barton points out that family history usually forms the beginning of an encomium, whereas in the case of Suetonius' *Nero* it provides an invective element in the biography (Barton 1994, 50–52).

63 There is not such a clear link between the traits of ancestors and an emperor's own character at the beginning of the biography of Tiberius (*ex hac stirpe Tiberius Caesar genus trahit*, *Tib.* 3.1).

64 See also Bradley 1978, 23.

of Nero's great-grandfather in *Ner.* 2.3, Nero's grandfather in *Ner.* 4, Nero's father in *Ner.* 5.1–2), and profligate (see Nero's grandfather in *Ner.* 4). Further similarities emerge: the father of Nero's great-grandfather is afraid of death and not able to commit suicide (*Ner.* 2.3); Nero's grandfather foreshadows Nero's love of chariot-driving, theatre, and the circus (*Ner.* 4); Nero's father is accused of incest with a close relative, in this case his sister (*Ner.* 5.2). By contrast, Domitian's biography does not start with a detailed family history, since Flavian family history has already been presented, if briefly, at the beginning of Vespasian's *Life* (*Vesp.* 1.2–4). At the very beginning of Vespasian's biography the Flavian family is rated altogether positively, with the exception of and in spite of Domitian (*Vesp.* 1.1).

(3) To turn to an emperor's early years, this distancing of the Suetonian Domitian from the rest of his family continues in his biography, when his upbringing and the behaviour of his father and brother during Vespasian's principate are depicted (*Dom.* 2.1): Vespasian, who, as Suetonius claims against the official version in Flavian media,[65] rebukes Domitian's behaviour, has his son live with him to make him more aware of his age and rank. Two examples following each other directly illuminate how among the Flavians Domitian is singled out from Vespasian and Titus. When they go out Vespasian and Titus go in their sedan chairs (sitting upright), Domitian follows them in his litter (forced to recline) (*Dom.* 2.1).[66] When they both celebrate their triumph over the Jews, the first time one has been granted to a father and son,[67] Domitian accompanies them on a white horse (*Dom.* 2.1).[68] This alleged distance also makes Domitian's joint guilt in Titus' death and the few honours he bestowed on his dead brother more probable (*Dom.* 2.3).[69] Thus, Domitian's upbringing shows that his father distanced himself from his son and functions as proof that he was indeed different from his father and brother. More directly, Nero's father

65 See Jones 1996, 20 on a frieze from the Palazzo della Cancellaria, which provides us with the official version, in which Vespasian is pleased with Domitian.

66 Cf. Jones 1996, 21.

67 Cf. Jones 1996, 21.

68 In Flavius Josephus, by contrast, Titus follows Vespasian, and Domitian rides besides them in magnificent apparel on a horse that is well worth seeing: μεθ' ἃ Οὐεσπασιανὸς ἤλαυνε πρῶτος καὶ Τίτος εἵπετο, Δομετιανὸς δὲ παρίππευεν, αὐτός τε διαπρεπῶς κεκοσμημένος καὶ τὸν ἵππον παρέχων θέας ἄξιον ("Behind them drove first Vespasian, followed by Titus; while Domitian rode beside them, in magnificent apparel and mounted on a steed that was itself a sight", Joseph. *BJ* 7.152).

69 That Domitian only honoured Titus by deification is historically incorrect; see Jones 1996, 28, who collects evidence for Domitianic coins, inscriptions, and buildings that honour Titus.

discredits his son right after his birth when he says that from him and Agrippina only something detestable and harmful to the state could be born (*Ner.* 6.1). Nero's early years are then used to make his later behaviour more plausible.[70] With his father dead and his mother relegated he was brought up by his aunt Lepida and placed in the care of two tutors, one of them a dancer, the other a barber: *apud amitam Lepidam nutritus est sub duobus paedagogis, saltatore atque tonsore* (*Ner.* 6.3). While it was common to have slaves as tutors for children, the specification of these two as dancer and barber triggers associations with Nero's later interest in performances and his hairstyle (cf. *Ner.* 51).

(4) In his early years before the principate Suetonius' Nero already exhibits the cruelty of his character and gives proofs of it as soon as possible (*prodita immanitate naturae quibus primum potuit experimentis*, *Ner.* 7.1). The same assertion is made of Suetonius' Domitian. In his case too, as was mentioned before, his character was already recognizable in the years before his own principate: so impudently did he exercise every force of his power that it became clear even at that time what sort of man he would later be (*ceterum omnem vim dominationis tam licenter exercuit, ut iam tum qualis esset ostenderet*, *Dom.* 1.3).

(5) These two characters are confronted with the demands of the imperial role when they become *principes*. For both, Suetonius records what they do first at the start of their principate. Nero's first imperial deed (*statim ut imperium adeptus est, Ner.* 20) and the first mentioned among the negative deeds is that he summoned Terpnus to court, the leading lyre-player of the time. The structurally comparable scene in Domitian's *Life* tells us what he did every day at the beginning of his principate (*inter initia principatus cotidie*): he took hours for himself to spend them alone, catching flies and impaling them with a very sharp stylus (*secreto sibi horarum ⟨spatium⟩ sumere solebat nec quicquam amplius quam muscas captare ac stilo praeacuto configere*, *Dom.* 3.1).[71] The two situations are telling, since they are already along the lines of the reign that will follow and illustrate Nero's artistry and Domitian's cruelty and isolation.

70 For "errors of fact and detail" (Bradley 1978, 44) in this passage on Nero's childhood see Bradley 1978, 44–45. These 'errors' all serve the literary deconstruction of Nero.

71 On Domitian's desire for solitude and his depiction as tyrant see Hulls 2014, 184. On the different ancient versions of this episode see Zadorojnyi 2006, 351–353, whose interest is in Domitian's weapon, the stylus, as an instrument of tyrannical power, and the relationship of literary and imperial control.

2.2 *Coding through Rubrics*

2.2.1 Construction and Circular Logic of Rubrics

The coding of imperial representation in and by a rubric is, in comparison with Tacitus and Cassius Dio, a specifically Suetonian technique of deconstruction.[72] A rubric on a virtue or vice collects material that proves that the emperor can really be characterized by this character trait, for example as mild or cruel, civil or arrogant. A rubric on a topic of imperial representation presents instances of his conduct within this context, for example his military deeds, his administration, his buildings. Rubrics that consist of topics of representation are part of a positive or negative section on an emperor and so also prove a certain character trait, be it virtuous or vicious in general. Thus both Nero's *spectacula* (*Ner.* 11–13) and Domitian's buildings (*Dom.* 5) are in the section on their laudable (or neutral) deeds, whereas Caligula's divinity (*Calig.* 22) is part of the negative section *de monstro*.

The relation between the rubric's headword and the elements of the rubric is circular: the single elements form the rubric; at the same time the rubric determines how we read the single elements.[73] We have seen already that the headword of the rubric influences our interpretation of an emperor's renaming of the months: in Nero's case this act of imperial representation provides an example of his wish for popularity (*Ner.* 55), in Domitian's case it argues for his arrogance (*Dom.* 13.3). The context of the rubric thus defines how we evaluate the imperial actions depicted in it.

This section has dealt with two strategies concerning the rubrics which help to code imperial representation as negative: labelling and selecting information. We will see that neither of them is innocuous. They show potentially positive aspects of imperial representation to their disadvantage. Such an interpretation works on the assumption that a reader will accept and try to follow the logic of the text, which Suetonius points out by explicit comments and a clear disposition.[74] We will see later, however, that a different reading of the rubrics is possible, in which the rubrics partly deconstruct themselves.[75]

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72 For rubrics that recall Suetonius in Cassius Dio see p.224–225.

73 In this section I am drawing on my own article Schulz 2018 about the use of examples in rubrics in Suetonius' Flavian *Lives*.

74 See also p.308–310.

75 On p.327–329.

2.2.2 Labelling: Coding through Headwords

To study how the headword of a rubric determines the recipient's way of reading the single elements of a rubric and thus deconstructs them, we can turn to the rubric on Domitian's *arrogantia* (*Dom.* 12.3–13) and focus on its very beginning: the first example of Suetonius' Domitian being far from courteous, but rather presumptuous and unrestrained, both in his words and in his deeds (*minime civilis animi, confidens etiam et cum verbis tum rebus immodicus*) is from his youth (*ab iuventa*) (*Dom.* 12.3). This is remarkable since the *divisio* in *Dom.* 10.1 suggests that the rest of the biography presents vices from after 81 CE. Domitian's boldness and immoderateness is obviously supposed to be made plausible by early bad behaviour. The rubric *arrogantia* thereby not only seems larger, but Domitian's vice also figures as having been constant from the beginning.[76] We have already briefly touched upon this first instance that Suetonius labels arrogant: it refers to Domitian's behaviour towards Caenis, Vespasian's concubine (*Dom.* 12.3). When she returns from Istria and offers him a kiss (to greet him), Domitian just holds forth his hand (*Caenidi patris concubinae ex Histria reversae osculumque ut assuerat offerenti manum praebuit, Dom.* 12.3). Does a father's concubine deserve an intimate form of greeting? We read Domitian's neglect of a kiss as a negative action because it is reported under the rubric of Domitian's arrogance and because it is depicted as something unusual. The additional information that Suetonius' Domitian had been accustomed to kiss Caenis (*ut assuerat*) turns his behaviour here into something new that deviates from the ordinary, and so codes it more negatively. Maybe the reader also knows or recalls from Vespasian's *Life* that Caenis almost had the position of a legitimate wife (*paene iustae uxoris loco*, *Vesp.* 3), which further supports the negative framing.

There is also an example of Domitian's arrogance during his own principate (*principatus vero adeptus, Dom.* 13.1) that would be read differently if it were listed in another rubric. Suetonius here presents a statement of Domitian's that suggests his own divinity, which is to be interpreted as arrogant: Suetonius' Domitian proclaimed, when he took his wife back after the divorce, that he had recalled her to his divine couch (*pulvinar*, *Dom.* 13.1). We can compare this dictum of Domitian with an utterance of Suetonius' Vespasian about his own divinity. Whenever he got ill, so Suetonius, Vespasian said: "Alas! I think I am becoming a god" (*"vae", inquit, "puto, deus fio"*, *Vesp.* 23.4). In Vespasian's *Life*, however, this is not noted in a rubric on arrogance, but on humour (*dica-*

76 This technique of padding out a rubric is regarded as one of Suetonius' major mistakes by history scholars (cf. Flach 1972, 279).

citas/*ioci*). We hence assume that Vespasian said it tongue-in-cheek and do not read it in a negative way, as would otherwise be possible.[77] This reading is supported by the fame of Vespasian's wit.[78] Domitian's utterance about his divine couch is less innocent, since it refers to the present and not to the time after his death. Nonetheless it has humorous potential, as mentioned above.[79] If it was labelled as humour, we could read it as ironic too. And there would even be a suitable place in his biography: it would fit well within *Dom.* 20–21, which collects remarkable utterances by Domitian. But the context of this rubric defines it as a sincere and arrogant statement. It directly precedes the contention that Domitian and his wife were called *dominus* and *domina* in the amphitheatre (*Dom.* 13.1) and that he let himself be called *dominus et deus* (*Dom.* 13.2). Domitian's and Vespasian's statements are not dissimilar. They both refer to their own (potential) divinity. But the context of each of Suetonius' rubrics semanticizes it, resulting in a positive effect as *dicacitas* in one case and a negative effect as *arrogantia* in the other.

The same strategy of biased labelling can be found in other rubrics in which the imperial actions mentioned are not as negative as the rubric may suggest if one looks at them in isolation. The single elements, for example, that Suetonius lists to prove Domitian's *libido nimia* (*Dom.* 22.1) are almost innocent for a tyrant: Suetonius' Domitian calls his constant sexual activity "bed-wrestling", he depilates his mistresses, and swims with the commonest prostitutes.[80] We would not easily consider them as proof of excessive lust outside this rubric.[81] Other items might also have been part of a positive rubric. Domitian's *convivia*, for example, would fit well in a possible rubric on *moderatio*: Suetonius objects that Domitian's *convivia* did not last long and were not followed by a drinking party (*Dom.* 21). Other emperors are criticized for the opposite, for immoderate behaviour at feasts.[82] That Suetonius' Domitian is by contrast moderate is

77 Milns 2010, 121 entertains the possibility that Vespasian's statement was ascribed to him by his enemies with an originally malicious intention.

78 On Vespasian's humour cf. Luke 2009–2010: Suetonius uses the depiction of Vespasian's humour (*Vesp.* 8) to contrast him with Nero.

79 See p.290.

80 Cf. the overview of Krenkel 1980, 66–70 on the sexual vices of Suetonius' emperors, and Charles 2002, 39–40 on Suetonius' weak evidence for Domitian's *libido*.

81 The only severe accusation, namely that Domitian seduced his niece and forced her into an abortion and her death, is not credible; see Jones 1996, 151.

82 The first vice of Tiberius mentioned among his *vitia* is his abuse of wine (*Tib.* 42.1; cf. *Tib.* 72.3). Claudius tends to gluttony (*Claud.* 33.1), as do Galba (*Galb.* 22) and especially Vitellius (*Vit.* 13). Marc Antony prolongs his dinners with Cleopatra at his side until sunrise (*Iul.* 52.1). Cf. Charles 2002, 39. On Domitian's *comissationes* see also Jones 2002, 238–239.

not taken as an opportunity for praise, as it is for Suetonius' Titus.[83] It is rather connected to Domitian's desire for solitude: he prefers to go for a walk on his own instead.

The context and the headword under which imperial representation is depicted and labelled is not only important for single actions but also for whole rubrics, which can be grouped together into bigger sections. All of Caligula's vices are presented under the headword *de monstro*, the positive qualities under the at least neutral *quasi de principe* (*Calig.* 22.1). Nero's vices are split into two sections with headwords that suggest worse things than *vitia*, namely *probra* and *scelera* (Ner. 19.3). Nero's dinners (*Ner.* 27.2–3) are put in the negative context of *petulantia*, more by association than by thematic conformity. Nero's marriages do not form a single rubric (as marriages do in *Aug.* 62 and *Claud.* 26, marked by the first word *sponsam* or *sponsas*), but are integrated into the rubric on Nero's *crudelitas* (*Ner.* 35.1).

2.2.3 Selecting: Coding through Omissions

Suetonius selects the pieces of information he presents, as do the historiographers. But there are two important differences between Suetonius' selections and those of Tacitus and Cassius Dio, which characterize his specific form of deconstruction. First, Suetonius' focus is much more on the perspective of the emperor. Everything else that might be interesting or relevant in a context in which the emperor is involved, for example the conduct of the senate, is mostly omitted. The emperor whose biography Suetonius is writing is the only important parameter for the depiction. His perspective and the context of the rubric or narration determine which information is given. Thus Suetonius mentions the murder of Poppaea Sabina in the section on Nero's *crudelitas* (*Ner.* 35.1). But he does not tell us here that she was married to Otho, since this piece of information only becomes relevant in Otho's own biography (*Oth.* 3.1). Second, in the system of rubrics, selection seems less suspicious than in historiographical narratives at first sight. A rubric consists of single elements that prove a certain quality or illustrate forms of imperial representation and which are not necessarily as connected with each other as are actions in a continuous narrative. Rubrics are selective by nature; their selective character is hence not

83 Titus' moderate feasts are listed first among his *virtutes* as emperor (*Tit.* 7.2). With Augustus, potential criticism of similar behaviour is mitigated: he arrives late at his dinner parties and leaves early, but while he is there he shows himself to be highly sociable (*Aug.* 74). For this passage cf. Roller 2001, 145: "Such affability and unpretentiousness in the convivium (…) is associated with the absence of onerous displays of social hiearchy."

automatically to be considered a rhetorical strategy. The omission of elements is more justified from this literary perspective than in historiography.

But Suetonius' selection processes are far from innocent. They make generalizations from one negative deed extremely easy.[84] Additionally, Suetonius sometimes draws attention to his selection process and the fact that he has omitted several elements. Before giving examples of Tiberius' *saevitia* he makes clear that he is not listing all instances of cruel behaviour: *singillatim crudeliter facta eius exequi longum est, genera velut exemplaria saevitiae enumerare sat erit* (*Tib.* 61.2). And after claiming that Nero killed everyone without discrimination or restraint, Suetonius states explicitly that he will present only a small selection: *sed ne de pluribus referam* (*Ner.* 37.1). Also, early proof of Domitian's impudent behaviour is only given in examples (*ne exequar singula*, *Dom.* 1.3). The explicit marking of missing elements has the same effect as in historiography.[85] It makes the reader think that the number of negative actions that could have been mentioned must be high.

Reinforcing this effect, the selection processes and devices in the positive sections on bad emperors do not favour them either. Examples of highly selective rubrics are those on Domitian's buildings (*Dom.* 5)[86] and on his military actions (*Dom.* 6), which contrast sharply with the large number of examples of his *saevitia* (*Dom.* 10–11). Domitian's *opera* (*Dom.* 5)[87] are part of his neutral or even laudable deeds (*Dom.* 4–9) and are treated after his games (*spectacula*, *Dom.* 4) and before his military expeditions (*expeditiones*, *Dom.* 6). Following the logic of the text the reader is expecting examples that prove Domitian's positive achievements in his building endeavours. But the rubric in fact presents something potentially good as not exactly positive. If we think of the massive influence that the historical Domitian had on the urban landscape of Rome, we immediately notice how small this rubric is in Suetonius. According to Michael Charles, Suetonius "seems to display an almost complete indifference to the incontestable fact that Domitian was one of the Empire's most prolific builders".[88] I would argue, rather, that this neglect is not a sign of Suetonius' indifference to Domitian's building projects, but a literary strategy: by contrast, Vespasian's (*Vesp.* 8.5–9.1) and Titus' (*Tit.* 8.4) building politics are evaluated

84 For such generalizations see *Ner.* 24.1 with Bradley 1978, 143; Kierdorf 1992, 192, and *Ner.* 36.2 with Bradley 1978, 222; Kierdorf 1992, 214. See also Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 61 with reference to the complete *Caesares*.

85 Cf. p.226–227.

86 *Claud.* 20.1–3 is also superficial on Claudius' buildings (cf. Jones 1996, 49).

87 Cf. Charles 2002, 33–37 on Suetonius' treatment of Nero's and Domitian's buildings endeavours.

88 Charles 2002, 34.

positively. Domitian's palace on the Palatine, for example, which is so prominent in the panegyrics of Martial and Statius, is not mentioned at all.[89] It only becomes relevant in the narrative of Domitian's death as the setting of the events (*Dom.* 15.2).[90] Domitian's statues and triumphal arches are not listed among his building endeavours either, but only later in the rubric on *arrogantia* (*Dom.* 13.2). Even if we do not immediately recognize that these elements have been left out of the rubric *opera*,[91] we are reminded of them by their later appearance in the text, by then in a negative context. Also the following "summary of Domitian's *expeditiones* is far from complete. A brief outline of a few campaigns and triumphs is followed by a longer section describing a single incident (Saturninus' revolt of 89) in far greater detail".[92] The triumphs of 83 and 86 CE are striking for their omission. The focus is thus on the negative civil war.

2.3 *Disposition and Order of Rubrics: Guiding the Reader*

2.3.1 Explicit Divisions

A technique of Suetonian deconstruction that is closely intertwined with the strategy of rubricizing information is the disposition of information and of rubrics within a *Life*. Suetonius' structure is not innocent but conveys certain evaluations of emperors, both on the macro- and the micro-level.[93] The structure of Suetonius' biographies is characterized by specific divisions: between different kinds of rubrics, and between rubrics and chronological passages. There are several transitional statements (e.g. *Iul.* 44.4; *Aug.* 61.1; *Vit.* 10) that point out the structure of the text, but not every transition in the text receives such a marker.[94] The *Lives* of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian have one remark-

89 See, e.g., Mart. 8.36; 8.39; Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.

90 This mentioning of Domitian's palace only in the condemnatory sections of the text has also been pointed out by Charles 2002, 37.

91 The palace, as *domus Flavia*, is indeed only partly a public building endeavour, cf. Cordes 2017, 43 with further references to Darwall-Smith 1996 and Zanker 2004.

92 Jones 1996, 53.

93 The importance of composition and division for Suetonius' evaluations of his material in general has been recognized and analysed by Steidle ²1963; Cizek 1977, who includes a detailed disposition of all the *Lives* in his work. See also Townend 1967, 86; Mouchova 1968; Croisille 1970, who compares the *Life of Claudius* and the *Life of Nero* to illustrate how the differing structures suit the depiction of each of the two emperors; Lossau 1975, 498; 500; Gugel 1977, who takes an extreme position regarding Suetonius' purpose of literary disposition; Gascou 1984, 691–697. See also Power 2014a, 8: "Although *divisio* is common in ancient authors of biography and nearby genres, none use it nearly as often or elaborately as Suetonius".

94 Transitions do not have to be made explicit. They can be more subtle, as between the

able typical feature in common that is not shared by the rest of the *vitae*. For these three emperors Suetonius divides the text explicitly into a section about neutral or positive deeds and character traits on the one hand (*virtutes*), and a section about negative ones (*vitia*) on the other hand. Before analysing how these divisions are used to convey meaning and to assess an emperor and his representation, we need to recall the macro-structure of these three biographies.

The *Life of Caligula* begins with a short biography of his father Germanicus (*Calig.* 1–7), followed by Caligula's birth and early years up to his ascent to the principate (*Calig.* 8–14). The main part (*Calig.* 15–49) presents his time as *princeps* under different rubrics, before more personal characteristics (*Calig.* 50–55) and the events surrounding his death (*Calig.* 56–60) are discussed. The passage about Caligula as *princeps* in a strict sense (*Calig.* 15–49) falls into two parts, as the *divisio* in *Calig.* 22.1 points out, where Suetonius distinguishes briefly, but very explicitly, between the preceding chapters *Calig.* 15–21 and the following chapters *Calig.* 22–49: *hactenus quasi de principe, reliqua ut de monstro narranda sunt* (*Calig.* 22.1). So far, Suetonius says, he has dealt with Caligula as though (*quasi*) he was a *princeps*; what he will say now will have to be told as about a monster (*ut de monstro*) (*Calig.* 22.1). Suetonius distinguishes two aspects of Caligula, the *princeps* and the *monstrum*. But both words are qualified by adverbs (*quasi*; *ut*) signalling that they are used in an unusual way ("so to speak"; "as it were").[95] Caligula is not really a monster—a word that Suetonius uses nowhere else in the *Lives of the Caesars*—but he is also not really a *princeps*, as one might think after reading chapters *Calig.* 15–21. The *princeps*-like passage about him (*Calig.* 15–21) is followed by a much longer account of the monster-like Caligula (*Calig.* 22.1–49).

The next emperor whose reign is explicitly divided into 'neutral/good' and 'bad' is Nero.[96] After the description of Nero's ancestors and his early years (*Ner.* 1–7), his reign is presented under different rubrics (*Ner.* 8–39). Then follow his last weeks, his death and funeral (*Ner.* 40–50), his personal characteristics (*Ner.* 51–56), and the reactions to his death (*Ner.* 57). The passage on his reign is structured by the following *divisio*, a rhetorical statement on the structure of the text: *haec partim nulla reprehensione, partim etiam non mediocri*

libido-section and the *luxuria*-section in Nero's *Life* (*Ner.* 29 and 30.1), where the transition is achieved by ending the first and starting the second with a dictum of Nero. The transition from Nero's *luxuria* to his *avaritia* is achieved through the anecdote about Dido's treasure (*Ner.* 32).

95 Cf. OLD, s.v. *quasi* B9a; s.v. *ut* 8c.

96 On the division of the *Life of Nero* cf. also Lounsbury 1991, 3751–3760.

laude digna in unum contuli, ut secernerem a probris ac sceleribus eius, de quibus dehinc dicam (*Ner.* 19.3). With this nicely parallel sentence, Suetonius is saying that, in the preceding chapters (*Ner.* 8–19.2), he collected everything that merited no reproach or even high praise. He did this in order to separate this rather positive account from Nero's misdeeds and crimes, about which he will talk henceforth (*Ner.* 20–39).

The *Life of Domitian*, although much shorter than those of Caligula and Nero, is the only one that has two *divisiones*. The first one is set right after the account of Domitian's early years, his deeds before 81 CE (*Dom.* 1–3.1). We learn that for some time faults and virtues were mixed equally in him (*mixturaque*[97] *aequabili vitiorum atque virtutum*) until he turned his virtues into faults too: *donec virtutes quoque in vitia deflexit* (*Dom.* 3.2). Domitian deteriorates. The reader, who is informed about Domitian's deterioration even before the text has reached Domitian's accession to power, learns of Domitian's rather positive deeds first (*Dom.* 4–9), then of his faults (*Dom.* 10–13), finally of his death (*Dom.* 14–17), his personal characteristics (*Dom.* 18–22), and the reactions to his death (*Dom.* 23). Between virtues and vices, Suetonius has a second division, which recurs to the first one (*Dom.* 10.1): Domitian did not remain merciful and incorrupt, as he was described in *Dom.* 4–9, but declined into cruelty and greed, as will be depicted in *Dom.* 10–13.

2.3.2 *Divisiones* and Structure as Assessments

These *divisiones* and transitional statements (*Calig.* 22.1; *Ner.* 19.3; *Dom.* 3.2; 10.1) illuminate in a nutshell how Suetonius assesses and deconstructs these emperors on the whole. Caligula, here compared to a monster, is the worst. The description of his faults (*Calig.* 22.1–49) is roughly four times as long as the description of his other deeds (*Calig.* 15–21). Second to him in badness comes Domitian, who at least at the beginning of his reign showed a mixture of good and bad behaviour. The text on his rather positive actions (*Dom.* 4–9) is clearly longer than the text on his faults (*Dom.* 10–13). Nero's faults (*Ner.* 20–39) receive almost four times more text than his virtues (*Ner.* 8–19.2),[98] comparable in length to Caligula's description, but—unlike his uncle's accomplishments (*Calig.* 22.1)—Nero's deeds are explicitly praised by Suetonius (*Ner.* 19.3).

The transitional statements that point out this structure differ in their details. In the *divisio* in the *Life of Nero*, the narrator is strongly present, using the

97 Cf. Kaster 2016, 257 on the text (*mixturaque*).

98 I am referring to the length of the text in pages. The modern division into paragraphs, going back to Erasmus (cf. Pausch 2004, 264–265) is misleading here, since they are of very unequal length.

active voice and the first person singular (*contuli*; *ut secernerem*; *dicam*, *Ner.* 19.3). He displays control over the text and its structure and takes full responsibility for his *divisio,* the purpose of which he also explains to the reader. The passage in the *Life of Caligula* is also about how to structure the text from the point of view of a narrator (*Calig.* 22.1). However, the narrator does not refer to himself here explicitly and uses the construction with the gerund in passive voice instead of the first person (*narranda sunt*). The labels or headwords of the two sections that this division creates (*quasi de principe*; *ut de monstro*, *Calig.* 22.1) are also less concrete than in the parallel Nero-passage (*partim nulla reprehensione, partim etiam non mediocri laude digna*; *a probris ac sceleribus*, *Ner.* 19.3). The *divisio* in the *Life of Domitian* is not about how to structure the text as a narrator, but about Domitian himself, who is subject of both transitional sentences (*Dom.* 3.2; *Dom.* 10.1).[99] His own development from a mixture of faults and virtues to faults only, from mercifulness and uncorruptedness to cruelty and greed, is thus depicted as providing the structure for both Domitian's life and Suetonius' *Life of Domitian*.

Given these differences, the three *divisiones* and the dispositions of the *Lives* discussed still fulfil the same function. They guide the reader in reading the text. With the section on virtues and neutral deeds coming first in each case, the emphasis is on the vices, which come second in biographies of bad emperors. Consequently, in the *Life of Titus*, Suetonius' favourite emperor, the disposition is the other way round: the *vitia* come first (*Tit.* 6–7.1), and Suetonius adds that they all turned into the highest virtues eventually (*Tit.* 7.1). The emphasis on the second part of the *vitia* in Caligula's and Nero's *Lives* is reinforced further: since the *divisio* in each case directly precedes the bad deeds, these are explicitly introduced, whereas the rather positive deeds are only labelled as such after we have already read them.[100] Not only are the positive deeds of both Caligula and Nero not explicitly introduced as such. They are also preceded by sections that make it harder to read them in a positive way: Caligula's *Life* starts with a short biography of the idealized Germanicus. In comparison to him, Caligula's relatively good actions appear relatively bad. Also, we have seen that Nero's biography starts with a short family history, which is explicitly included

99 It is characteristic of Suetonius that he usually has the emperor as the subject of his main verbs, cf. Power 2014a, 5–7, according to whom 80% of Suetonius' main verbs refer to an action of the *princeps*. But, compared to the other transitional statements, the usage of having the emperor as subject who himself turns his virtues into vices stands out.

100 Reading the *Life of Nero* for the first time, the list of Nero's consulships in *Ner.* 14, for example, is not put into any context. We are given a complete account, but no evaluation. The evaluation only becomes apparent later (*Ner.* 19.3) when we hear that this part of the biography was about Nero's neutral or praiseworthy deeds.

to demonstrate from whom Nero inherited his vices (*Ner.* 1.2). For that reason the following good deeds just make the reader wait for the vices.

This is different in Domitian's biography, in which the virtues are announced before they are presented (*Dom.* 3.2). However, this *divisio* also points out already that the virtues, mixed from the beginning with negative behaviour, finally become vices. What is more, this development has been stated twice before: even earlier in Domitian's biography (*Dom.* 1.3) and at the very beginning of the *Life of Vespasian* (*constet licet Domitianum cupiditatis ac saevitiae merito poenas luisse*, "although it is agreed that Domitian was punished rightly for his lust and cruelty", *Vesp.* 1.1). The fact that Domitian's deterioration is pointed out three times altogether (*Vesp.* 1.1; *Dom.* 1.3; *Dom.* 3.2) before his virtues have even been presented makes up for the fact that the virtues are, in contrast to the *Lives* of Caligula and Nero, introduced explicitly before they are discussed. Additionally, the structure of Domitian's *Life*, unlike Nero's, also has a chronological aspect, as is implied by the term *aliquamdiu* in the phrase *aliquamdiu se varium praestitit* and the *donec*-sentence in the first transitional statement (*Dom.* 3.2), as well as the *celerius* in the second transitional statement (*Dom.* 10.1).[101] This temporal structure limits the virtues to an early period of Domitian's reign and marginalizes them.[102] Again, we find the same strategy the other way round in the *Life of Titus*, in which Titus' vices are confined to his early years (*Tit.* 7.1).

2.3.3 Building Unity

Suetonian structure, with its rubrics, narrative passages, *divisiones*, and transitional statements, also displays devices that produce the impression of unity in the text or text passage.[103] One of these devices is foreshadowing, such as in the opening passage of the *Life of Domitian* (*Dom.* 1–3.1). The section on Domitian's positive deeds (*Dom.* 4–9) and the first *divisio* (*Dom.* 3.2), which we have just discussed, are preceded by a passage on Domitian's negative deeds before 81 CE and in the early years of his principate. This passage further diminishes

101 Suetonius' Domitian is here similar to Suetonius' Tiberius: following the positive behaviour by Tiberius depicted in *Tib.* 26–32, he gradually deteriorated; we learn later that he was able to conceal his vices somewhat for a long time, but that they broke forth during his time in Capri (*cuncta simul vitia male diu dissimulata tandem profudit*, *Tib.* 42.1).

102 Cf. the foreshadowing adverb *aliquamdiu* and the expression *inter initia* in *Dom.* 9.1.

103 A device I am not treating here explicitly that also adds to the impression of unity is Suetonian ring composition (see Power 2014b, who discusses the endings of several biographies, the reminiscences of earlier points they produce, and the effect of closure achieved thereby). On stylistic and aesthetic grounds, Suetonius' rhythmical prose and the use of clausulae (see Lounsbury 1991, 3770–3777) add to the marking of structure and unity too.

the impression made by the announced virtues of Suetonius' Domitian in the first *divisio* (*Dom.* 3.2). Several narrative elements that occur in this passage foreshadow his bad behaviour and imperial representation later (*Dom.* 1–3.1): Suetonius here points out Domitian's passive homosexuality, his passiveness in war and his cowardice, his taking up political responsibility only formally, his misuse of power and his *licentia* (including sexual relations), his taking someone else's wife, his arrogance, social isolation, and cruelty, his bad military actions, his acting from personal reasons and presenting of bogus reasons, Vespasian and Titus as Domitian's opponents, and Domitian's *simulatio* (regarding his interest in poetry). On a smaller scale, single temporal adverbs can also foreshadow a change of good behaviour, such as *diu* in *Ner.* 15.2, or *paulatim* and *primo* in *Tib.* 33.

A second structural element that contributes to the unity of a text passage are patterns such as parallelisms and chiasmus. The *divisio* in the *Life of Domitian* introduces three possible reasons (*quantum coniectare licet*) for Domitian finally turning his virtues into vices: these are his character (*super ingenii naturam*); his poverty (cf. *Dom.* 1.1), which made him greedy (*inopia rapax*); and his fear, which made him cruel (*metu saevus*) (*Dom.* 3.2). The later section on his vices (*Dom.* 10–13) consists of three rubrics: *saevitia* (*Dom.* 10–11), which takes up *metu saevus* (*Dom.* 3.2); *cupiditas* (*Dom.* 12.1–2), which picks up *inopia rapax* (*Dom.* 3.2); and *arrogantia* (*Dom.* 12.3–13). *arrogantia* is emphasized as the last in the triad of Domitian's vices. Since not only the two elements of *saevitia*/*metus* and *cupiditas*/*inopia*, but all three elements in the division correspond (chiastically) to the three vices, Domitian's arrogance is here attributed to his character.[104] This does not contradict the above-mentioned chronological element of the division and structure of the *Life*: Suetonius' Domitian declined into *saevitia* first, then into *cupiditas* (*Dom.* 10.1). Both of these motifs were already foreshadowed in the opening section (cf. *Dom.* 1.1 on *inopia* and *Dom.* 1.2–3 implicitly on fear) and pointed out as Domitian's main vices in the opening section of the first Flavian *Life* (*Vesp.* 1.1). But arrogance is presented as very typical of his character.

Similarly, a text section gains unity by parallel structures and by picking up and varying a motif or sequence of motifs. A good example of this technique is the section on Nero's vices with its two parts of *probra* (*Ner.* 20–25) and *scelera* (*Ner.* 26–38). We have already seen that, while the *scelera*-part is structured by vices that are *topoi* for more or less all tyrants (*petulantia*, *libido*, *luxuria*, *avari-*

104 This may provide an answer to the question why *arrogantia* was not announced beforehand (as noted by Mouchova 1968, 101).

tia, crudelitas), the *probra* can be characterized as the truly Neronian section. To recap the structure of the section: it comprises Nero's musical activities (*Ner.* 20–21.2), Nero as actor (*Ner.* 21.2–3), Nero as charioteer (*Ner.* 22.1–3), and Nero's grand tour of Greece and his triumph in Rome (*Ner.* 22.3–25). It can be read as a self-contained unit: three distinct topics (music, acting, chariot-driving) are brought together and further developed in the description of one event, the journey to Greece. The section on Nero's *probra* starts and ends with a remark on Nero's voice and the professional exercises and care that he applied to it (*Ner.* 20.1; 25.3). This rounds off the section and Suetonius comes full circle at its end.

2.4 *Amplification: Rubrics and Crescendo*

The order of the rubrics within Nero's *probra*-section is an example of amplification as regards the arrangement of several rubrics:[105] from Nero's interest in music, to acting, to chariot-driving, the social status of each performance art gets lower and lower, illuminating Nero's deterioration. This grouping and arranging of rubrics or text passages, which aims at unity, variety, and amplification, has been analysed as typical of Suetonius by Wolf Steidle.[106] It is a principal device of Suetonian deconstruction. Examples of amplification are not confined to the macro-structure of the text. We also find them among the elements of a single rubric. The section on Nero's *libido* (*Ner.* 28–29), for example, involves several amplifications. It starts with some single cases (*Ner.* 28), which are followed by Nero's impudence in general (*Ner.* 29). The single cases in the first part are carefully balanced: three representatives of social groups precede three individuals. The three group-representatives present a climax, since the punishment for each of the crimes mentioned gets higher and higher: Nero seduced free-born boys, married women, and a Vestal virgin.[107] Also, the following three individual cases are in climactic order: the freedwoman Acte comes before the eunuch Sporus and finally Nero's mother Agrippina. The love for a freedwoman is the least reproachable in this list, in which transforming a boy into a woman and empress is outdone only by Nero's desire for incest with his own mother. The rubric ends by showing how Suetonius' Nero transgresses his

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105 Cf. Pausch 2013, 61 on the climactic order of the *probra ac scelera* section. On gradation and crescendo as Suetonian techniques see also Cizek 1977, 118–134; Gascou 1984, 697–700.

106 Cf. Steidle ^{2}1963, 80 on *Iul.* 26 ff. ("Prinzip der Summierung und überlegten Gruppierung") and Steidle ^{2}1963, 81 on the *Life of Caligula*: "Sueton reiht also auch im einzelnen nicht einfach aneinander, sondern schafft Zusammenhang und ist um Abwechslung und Steigerung bemüht." See also Steidle ^{2}1963, 89 briefly on the *Life of Nero*.

107 For a 'hierarchy' of sexual reproaches cf. Krenkel 1980, 70.

libido into the animalistic world: in the game with Doryphorus he dresses up as a wild beast and attacks the private parts of men and women who had been tied to stakes. The climax is finally achieved by a general statement by Suetonius' Nero himself, revealing his idea of humans as unchaste and impure altogether (*neminem hominem pudicum aut ulla corporis parte purum esse*, *Ner.* 29).

For both Nero and Domitian the rubrics on *crudelitas* are structured according to the rules of rhetorical amplification.[108] The section on Nero's *crudelitas* and *saevitia* (*Ner.* 33–38) starts with cruel conduct towards close family members (Claudius, Britannicus, Agrippina, Domitia), including murders, in chronological order (*Ner.* 33–34), then adds his wives, Octavia and Poppaea Sabina, as well as Messalina, whom he did not kill, (*Ner.* 35.1–3), and finally expands to all sorts of relatives and relations, including Antonia, Aulus Plautius, Rufrius Scripinus, Tuscus, Seneca, Burrus, and freedmen (*Ner.* 35.4–5). The death of Burrus is integrated into this rubric in a typically Suetonian way. We have seen above that Tacitus presents two possible reasons for Burrus' death—illness or poison—only to refute the theory of Burrus' illness, in Tacitus' usual way of dealing with alternatives (Tac. *Ann.* 14.51.1–2).[109] In Cassius Dio we have encountered Burrus' death as part of a narrative development and a chain of events that leads to Nero poisoning Burrus (Cass. Dio 62.13.1–3).[110] In Suetonius, Burrus' death is simply an example of Nero's cruelty. It follows the death of Seneca, together with whom Burrus had educated Nero. And it serves as a link to the freedmen who are mentioned next, since both Burrus and the freedmen are said to have been killed by poison.

Another expansion of Nero's *crudelitas/saevitia* is presented by his murders of people outside his household (*nec minore saevitia foris*, *Ner.* 36.1), including the whole aristocracy (*nobilissimo cuique exitium destinavit*, *Ner.* 36.1), and the members of two conspiracies, the Pisonian conspiracy and the conspiracy of Vinicianus (*Ner.* 36.2). A final amplification consists in Nero killing without discrimination or restraint and for any reason (*nullus posthac adhibitus dilectus aut modus interimendi quoscumque libuisset quacumque de causa*, *Ner.* 37.1). Nero also wants to kill the whole senatorial order (*Ner.* 37.3). The Great Fire of Rome is introduced, following these examples of cruelty, as directed against the people and the city itself, in addition to the murders of the senators mentioned before: *sed nec populo aut moenibus patriae pepercit* (*Ner.* 38.1). In the list of buildings that burnt down during the fire we can see that amplification

108 For the crescendo of structure in the rubric on Nero's *crudelitas* cf. also Lounsbury 1991, 3753. On the invective background of *topoi* on Nero's cruelty cf. Barton 1994, 55–56.

109 See p.140.

110 See p.223 on the persuasive order in this text passage.

is also operative in the climactic order of single elements too. The sentence describing this destruction points out its massiveness in time and space. It leads from the enormous number of regular apartment houses (*tunc praeter immensum numerum insularum*) to the houses of old generals, including the spoils of battles which had hitherto adorned them (*domus priscorum ducum arserunt hostilibus adhuc spoliis adornatae*), to the temples of the gods, vowed and dedicated by the kings and then in the Punic and Gallic wars (*deorumque aedes ab regibus ac deinde Punicis et Gallicis bellis votae dedicataeque*), to everything that could be seen and remembered from the olden days (*et quidquid visendum atque memorabile ex antiquitate duraverat*) (*Ner.* 38.2). This sentence presents an amplification of the owners of the houses destroyed (regular people, old generals, gods), an amplification of the past that Suetonius' Nero destroys (buildings of the present, older spoils, temples from the regal period, everything from *antiquitas*), and a climax in the amounts, starting with *immensum numerum* and finally leading to *quidquid*.

Domitian's *saevitia*-rubric (*Dom.* 10–11), too, is structured to good effect and displays the device of amplification.[111] We can distinguish five parts with different emphases, which produce the effect of amplification. The rubric starts with the aforementioned transition from the emperor's *virtutes*, *clementia* and *abstinentia*, to his *vitia*, *saevitia* and *cupiditas* (*Dom.* 10.1). Cruelty is considered to be earlier (*Dom.* 10.1) and is discussed first (*Dom.* 10–11). It begins—parallel to and in contrast with Vespasian's clemency (*Vesp.* 13)—with three individual cases that prove Domitian's cruelty: a disciple of the pantomime Paris, Hermogenes of Tarsos (as well as his scribes), and an unknown father of a family. We have already analysed the reasons for all three murders, which Suetonius calls trivial, making the murders appear even more cruel.

Suetonius' Domitian proves to be cruel not only towards these three individuals (*Dom.* 10.1) but also towards a whole group of senators (*Dom.* 10.2–4). In expanding the people affected by his vice to a large number of Roman aristocrats, this part of the text displays a clear amplification. Suetonius mentions the senators as a group at the beginning of this section (*complures senatores*) and has ten individual cases follow. The fact that he gives their names—which he rarely does in the Flavian *Lives* or the six last *Lives*[112]—and lists the reproaches produces clarity and detail, which increases its plausibility. As in the first part (*Dom.* 10.1) Suetonius unmasks the reasons of his Domitian. What is more,

111 See also Schulz 2018, 312–315. Cf. Galtier 2009, 90 on the rubric *arrogantia* in Domitian's *Life* (*Dom.* 12.3–13).

112 Cf. Konstan 2009, 461.

he adds evaluations which clearly express a distance from Domitian's behaviour. We have seen them above as examples of direct evaluations: reasons are unmasked as fake reasons (*quasi molitores rerum novarum*, *Dom.* 10.2) or generally termed extremely trifling (*levissima … de causa*, *Dom.* 10.2). Domitian's assessment of the suspiciousness of certain jokes of Aelius Lamia is rebuked as wrong (*Dom.* 10.2). In this list, the senatorial victims of Domitian's cruelty are not given in the order of their assassination: the years of death of the people listed are, following the order of the text 89, 93, 95, 93, 93, 91 CE, sometime between 86 and 96 CE, 93 CE, 93 CE, and 89 CE.[113] The order of these individual cases offers rather a potpourri that shows various aspects of the cruel tyrant Domitian. He figures as someone who is afraid of revolution and of rivals, who acts haphazardly, is humourless, and intervenes against the honour and respect awarded to people who are, in his opinion, not sufficiently in favour of the imperial system.

The third part (*Dom.* 10.5) starts by giving a date and amplifies Domitian's cruelty. Sometime after the civil war (*aliquanto post civilis belli victoriam*)—Suetonius is referring to the revolt of Saturninus in 88/89 CE—Domitian became more cruel (*saevior*). There is no more explicit dating than this. But when we look at the murders mentioned in the preceding passage we realize that these murders should all have been listed in this part of the text, since they all happened after 89 CE.[114] By separating these murders from the preceding passage Suetonius in fact mentions them twice. Thus, they serve the amplification pursued in the passage. Differently from the two first passages, Suetonius now includes the methods that Domitian applied against his victims. Two kinds of torture stand out: as briefly mentioned in the context of innovations above, he burns the genitals of the people he interrogates, and he has the hands of some cut off. This part of the text thus puts emphasis on the vivid depiction of physical cruelty.

The fourth part (*Dom.* 11.1) presents another amplification, since now a psychological component is added to the physical one. Domitian's cruelty is not only vast—this has already been shown by the examples so far—but is also insidious and unexpected (*erat autem non solum magnae sed etiam callidae inopinataeque saevitiae*). As the two following examples illustrate, one could never feel safe in one's good relationship with Domitian. Domitian's behaviour,

113 On the dates of death of these ten victims cf. Gascou 1984, 411–412. Cf. also Gascou 2001, 157–158 on the manipulation of chronology in this passage.

114 See Gascou 1984, 411–412. A single exception may be the murder of Sallustius Lucullus, which can only be dated between 86 CE and 96 CE. But even if it took place before the revolt of Saturninus, nine out of ten murders are still later than the revolt.

so Suetonius, could quickly change and suddenly become savage. The examples of a steward and of Arrecinus Clemens illustrate this. The first enjoys the imperial presence and a meal with the emperor on the very day before (*pridie*) his crucifixion. The second learns from Domitian himself that his *delator* has an audience the following day (*cras*). The reader is to understand that the signs of praise and benevolence that Domitian shows may switch from one day to the next (*pridie*; *cras*) and be transformed into cruelty.

The last part of the rubric on *saevitia* goes even further (*Dom.* 11.2–3): the form of cruelty finally presented is a perversion of the virtue *clementia*. Just when Domitian appears clement and gentle from the outside, this is, so Suetonius, a clear indicator of a horrible outcome (*ut non aliud iam certius atrocis exitus signum esset quam principii lenitas*, *Dom.* 11.2). The text here arrives at its climax when *clementia*—of all virtues—is depicted as the precursor of *saevitia*.

3 Ambivalent Techniques and a Weaker Form of Deconstruction

3.1 *The Virtues of Bad Emperors: In Favour of Eccentric Representation?*

3.1.1 Good or Bad?—Undermining the Virtues of Bad Emperors

Even though we find several historiographical techniques of deconstruction in Suetonius, and even though he applies some specific means of deconstruction typical of his biographies, as we have seen in the previous sections, yet there are some characteristics of Suetonius' text that prevent deconstruction from being as effective and being developed as fully as it is in the historiographical texts. The characteristic feature of the text that, at first glance, weakens deconstruction most clearly is the rubrics on the virtues of bad emperors: although depicted with clear tyrannical traits by Suetonius, the three emperors Caligula, Nero, and Domitian are nonetheless given an explicitly positive section on their *virtutes*. But the virtues are in fact often undermined. In the previous sections we have already come across several techniques of deconstruction that present imperial behaviour as something negative, even when it is part of the *virtutes*-section. With these techniques of denigration even in the positive rubrics, we are forced to think of the *virtutes* as at least ambivalent rubrics. This is especially apparent in the case of Domitian: the first transitional statement in the *Life of Domitian* already points out that even his positive phase was mixed with faults (*aliquamdiu se varium praestitit mixturaque aequabili vitiorum atque virtutum*, "for some time he showed himself as fickle, displaying an equal mixture of faults and virtues", *Dom.* 3.2).

The devices that undermine the virtues of emperors who are bad overall can be summarized as follows:

(1) First of all, we have seen that the positive accounts are sometimes highly selective. Many more positive things could have been said about Domitian's *spectacula* (*Dom.* 4), for example, which are praised in panegyrical literature; on the topic of his *opera* (*Dom.* 5); or his *expeditiones* in *Dom.* 6.1.[115] In some instances, only the label of a rubric itself seems positive, but not the single elements it comprises.

(2) Second, even ostensibly positive deeds can be weakened by negative connotations or details. This applies to the behaviour of both Caligula and Nero at the very beginning of their principate. Caligula's reverence and honours for his family are analysed as well-calculated performances (cf. *scaena* in *Calig.* 15.1) and as actions aimed at popularity (*popularitas*) with the people (*Calig.* 15.1–3). The fact that he freed those who had been condemned or exiled is likewise explained by his wish for popularity (*Calig.* 15.4). The start of Nero's principate, although included in the positive section, is given a negative connotation (*ob totius diei diritatem*, *Ner.* 8). The section on Nero's positive deeds (*Ner.* 8–19.2) begins with Nero's *pietas* (*Ner.* 9) and Nero's Augustan virtues of *liberalitas*, *clementia*, and *comitas* (*Ner.* 10), which are all illustrated by examples. However, in both sections Suetonius' Nero is not said to have possessed these virtues in reality, but merely to have made a show of them. Nero's demonstration of *pietas*, especially as regards Claudius, is termed *ostentatio* (*Ner.* 9): the expressions *ostentatio* (*Ner.* 9) and *ostendere* (*Ner.* 10) refer to exhibition and display, and may even suggest simulation of these virtues. If the section was really meant to praise Nero's virtues, Suetonius should and could have been a lot more positive.[116]

Domitian's success as regards his games, his building endeavours, and his military success is also diluted by giving negative details. His *spectacula* are characterized as *sumptuosa*, expensive (*Dom.* 4.1).[117] He is said to have rebuilt a great number of splendid structures which had been destroyed by fire, probably in 80 CE. But they are coded negatively when Suetonius claims that in reconstructing buildings that were destroyed during the fire Domitian annihilated the *memoria* of the original builders by putting his name only onto the build-

115 Cf. Jones 1996, 53; Bradley 1981, 133: "hostile bias against Domitian is so pervasive that his favourable accomplishments are belittled throughout". See also Bradley 1991, 3728 on Suetonius diminishing Domitian's achievements.

116 Because of the motif of *ostentatio* Mouchova 1968, 90–91 argues that the section *Ner.* 9–13 does not yet present Nero's neutral or positive deeds, but this is not in accordance with the *divisio* in *Ner.* 19.3.

117 Cf. Jones 1996, 35 on *Dom.* 4.1 (*spectacula assidue magnifica et sumptuosa edidit*): "Suetonius' introduction is less than generous: he manages to summarize Domitian's achievement in but three words, one of which is hostile."

ings (*sed omnia sub titulo tantum suo ac sine ulla pristini auctoris memoria*, *Dom.* 5).[118] Domitian's rebuilding of the libraries after the fire is only mentioned at the end of the biography after the depiction of his death, in the rather negative section on personal details (*Dom.* 20), although it took place at the beginning of his reign and would hence have fit well in *Dom.* 5. The two techniques of giving additional negative information and omitting potentially positive examples work hand in hand, and resist the positive potential of a rubric on Domitian's buildings.

Furthermore, the campaign against the Chatti in 82/83 CE is introduced as unjustified (*sponte in Chattos*, *Dom.* 6.1). The double triumph against the Chatti and the Dacians is belittled by saying that it followed battles of variable success, both defeats and victories (*varia proelia*, *Dom.* 6.1), so Suetonius. Domitian's victory over the Sarmatians did not lead to a formal triumph, and Domitian dedicated nothing but a laurel wreath to Jupiter Capitolinus (*de Sarmatis lauream modo Capitolino Iovi rettulit*, *Dom.* 6.1). According to Suetonius, Domitian was successful in winning the civil war (*bellum civile*) against L. Antonius Saturninus in 89 CE, without being present himself and by an amazing stroke of good fortune (*confecit absens felicitate mira*) (*Dom.* 6.2).

(3) The third device that undermines virtues is the lack of a supportive argumentative structure in the text, which makes things appear less positive than they potentially are. We have seen above the argumentative effect that a forceful rhetorical structure can exert. The ostensibly positive rubric on Domitian's administration (*Dom.* 7–9), for example, is not ordered in a way that would reinforce the positives. Several positive elements of his reign and his administration are mentioned, but they are not presented forcefully, for example with amplification. This disorder is strategic: it keeps the potentially positive elements from forming a positive rubric, which is the more conspicuous since the following rubric on *saevitia* is arranged to great rhetorical effect, as we have just seen.[119]

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118 This contention is not exactly in accord with our epigraphical evidence. Cf. Jones 1996, 51, who refers to the formula *Domitianus … restituit*, by which Domitian does not in fact arrogate the original building to himself, but focuses only on the restoration process. Cf. also Charles 2002, 35, more cautiously referring to the same passage and reading it as foreshadowing Domitian's *arrogantia*: "We cannot be sure whether this is simply a malicious accusation or a reflection of reality."

119 I hence find insufficient the explanation of Jones 1996, 61–62, who speaks of Suetonius' "disregard of his own guiding principles", which "may have been intended to reflect his view of Domitian's behaviour", and considers this "an indication of the hasty composition evident elsewhere in this Vita".

(4) Most importantly, the disposition of the text assigns more argumentative force to the *vitia*, since they are placed second after the *virtutes*.[120] The section on negative deeds, which is also foreshadowed in the preceding sections and is clearly longer than the positive accounts in the *Lives* of Caligula and Nero, is therefore more prominent and is also what the readers keep more firmly in mind.

3.1.2 Bad or Good?—The Vices of Good Emperors

Suetonius is indeed not as positive as he could be in these sections about bad emperors. That he would have been able to present his material in the *virtutes*-rubrics more positively becomes even more apparent when we consider a complementary technique he applies in the *Lives* of his good emperors.[121] Not only is he, of course, more positive about their deeds. He even turns their alleged vices into virtues. A good example of this technique is Suetonius' recoding of Vespasian's greed (*Vesp.* 16–19).[122] *pecuniae cupiditas* was evidently the only reproach possible against the first Flavian emperor.[123] But the passage that Suetonius dedicates to this topic argues that this was in fact not a real *vitium*. We can here observe a clear development and re-coding of the motif of greed.[124] At the beginning we hear that greed was the only thing Vespasian was ever justly reproached for: *sola est in qua merito culpetur pecuniae cupiditas* (*Vesp.* 16.1). His conduct and the comments of some people about Vespasian's natural character serve as proof (*Vesp.* 16.1–3). But this contention is soon confronted with an opposite opinion (*sunt contra qui opinentur*), according to which Vespasian was forced to take these measures because of the drained resources of the treasury and the imperial funds (*Vesp.* 16.3). This recoding is a rhetorical device: Suetonius here follows Quintilian (*Inst.* 4.2.77), who recommends answering the reproach of greed (*avaritia*) by its interpret-

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120 Plass has used the term "disappointed expectation" to refer to this structure in which the positive deeds precede the negative ones (Plass 1988, 19); cf. Langlands 2014, 123. The reader's expectation is, however, only disappointed if he or she ignores all the hints that foreshadow the vices; cf. p.311–313.

121 Cf. Schulz 2018, 320–322 on Vespasian's and Titus' vices in Suetonius.

122 Suetonius' Vespasian had been depicted as not greedy already in *Vesp.* 4.3.

123 For this reproach cf. with Jones 2000, 91–93: Tact. *Hist.* 2.5; Plin. *Pan.* 41.3.

124 Cf. similarly Graf 1937, 95–101. Different is the interpretation of Murphy 1991, 3783, who does not acknowledge a recoding of Vespasian's avarice here. According to him, the positive evaluation of Vespasian's treatment of the state's finances is embedded in the context of 'avarice': "But even Suetonius, while criticizing some of Vespasian's methods, does have to concede that Vespasian used the funds responsibly for the common good." Krüpe 2007, 72 n. 85 reads "bei aller kritischen Wertschätzung eine beißende Verurteilung".

ation as economy (*parsimonia*). The examples given of Vespasian's *pecuniae cupiditas* are, we learn in Suetonius' account, in fact examples of a necessary financial policy. The two different positions are weighed up and the conclusion is that the second is more probable: *quod veri similius videtur* (*Vesp.* 16.3). While Suetonius has shown so far that Vespasian's saving measures were not the result of his greed but of the political situation, he now even adds examples of Vespasian's generosity. Several *exempla* are given for his being *liberalissimus* towards all social groups (*Vesp.* 17–19.1). But, even though Vespasian is so liberal, the old bad reputation of greed still persists: *et tamen ne sic quidem pristina cupiditatis infamia caruit* (*Vesp.* 19.1). Suetonius has now turned the deserved reproach of greed (*Vesp.* 16.1) into an old and infamous piece of gossip. The last examples he presents are termed examples of this *infamia* (*Vesp.* 19.2).

There is only one passage in the *Lives* that is even more explicit in judging and re-coding apparent vices, tellingly in the biography of Suetonius' favourite *princeps* Titus. At the beginning of his short *vita* Titus is introduced as *amor ac deliciae generis humani* (*Tit.* 1.1).[125] This early and clear statement determines how to read the rest of the *Life*. After birth and education (*Tit.* 1–2) Suetonius depicts—very early compared to other biographies—Titus' physical and mental advantages (*Tit.* 3). Then there follows a chronological section each on his career up to the principate (*Tit.* 4–6), his *vitia* (*Tit.* 7.1), and *virtutes* or positive deeds (*Tit.* 7.2–9), before the depiction of his death and reactions to it (*Tit.* 10–11). In *Tit.* 6 and *Tit.* 7.1 there are negative statements on Titus' *incivilitas*, *saevitia*, *luxuria*, his *libido* and love for Berenice, and his *rapacitas*. Suetonius also mentions that Titus was called *alius Nero*, which provides a kind of summary and climax of this list of reproaches (*Tit.* 7.1). Titus' faults are thus not silenced or suppressed. The contention that this bad reputation turned into something good, even to high praise, that one could find no fault in him but—by contrast—only the highest virtues, follows quite suddenly: *at illi ea fama pro bono cessit conversaque est in maximas laudes neque vitio ullo reperto et contra virtutibus summis* (*Tit.* 7.1). Here in the transition from Titus the private person to Titus the emperor the text clearly instructs us—without further argument—how we are to read Titus' vices, namely as faults of the private person Titus, who got rid of them upon beginning his principate.[126] Unlike his brother Domi-

125 In this *Life* biography and panegyric are particularly close, cf. Luck 1964, 64; Konstan 2009, 448.

126 For the lack of an explanation of this change in Titus' behaviour see Luck 1964, 64–65, who rightly observes a "merkwürdige Ambivalenz des Titusbildes" (Luck 1964, 75) for this part of the biography, and Konstan 2009, 457. On the ambiguity of the image of Titus (and the

tian, who was still bad after his accession to power (*Dom.* 1.3), the start of Titus' principate becomes the turning point for the behaviour of Titus' Suetonius. To illuminate this, Suetonius with great rhetorical effect contrasts the earlier vices with their respective virtues. Instead of *luxuria* (*Tit.* 7.1) we read of moderate dinners (*Tit.* 7.2). Berenice, to whom he is said to have promised marriage (*Tit.* 7.1), is expelled from Rome (*Tit.* 7.2).[127] Instead of *rapacitas* (*Tit.* 7.1) we find examples of *munificentia* and *benivolentia* (*Tit.* 7.3–8.1). In place of *incivilitas* (*Tit.* 6.1) there are *comitas* and *popularitas* (*Tit.* 8.2).

3.1.3 Still Virtues

Even if the rubrics on virtues of bad emperors are not as positive as those of good emperors, they are still there and draw attention to the fact that these emperors cannot be considered exclusively bad.[128] Yet we should not take that for granted.[129] A contemporary reader may well have been surprised by these sections and the presence of some positive assessments of imperial representation. Although Suetonius draws an overall negative picture of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, as well as of Tiberius, he includes sections about their positive deeds in his *Lives* (*Calig.* 15–21; *Ner.* 8–19.2; *Dom.* 4–9; similarly *Tib.* 26–39), sometimes even deeds that are coded negatively elsewhere, and he also applies in positive contexts the same rhetorical techniques that are used to amplify vices.[130] His aim is obviously not to use the techniques of deconstruction to paint a picture of these emperors as dark as possible.[131]

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similarity of Suetonius' Titus and Suetonius' Augustus) cf. also Tatum 2014, 171; 174–177. The distinction of Titus' life into two parts, a licentious youth and a moderate principate, is also present in Tacitus: *laetam voluptatibus adulescentiam egit, suo quam patris imperio moderatior* ("he spent his youth in the delights of self-indulgence, but he was more moderate in his own reign than in that of his father", Tac. *Hist.* 2.2.1).

127 On Titus and Berenice see Wesch-Klein 2005, 168, who points out that Suetonius mentions Titus' separation from Berenice—differently from Cassius Dio—right after his accession to power. This way Suetonius can directly contrast each vice with its opposing virtue.

128 Cf. Bradley 1991, 3725: "Suetonius has recognized that despite evil character, both Nero and Domitian had been able to meet successfully some of the public responsibilities that confronted all emperors".

129 Cf. Pausch's analysis of Nero as artist in Suetonius compared to Tacitus and Cassius Dio (see Pausch 2013, 46): differently from the historiographers, Suetonius' depiction does not present Nero's artistry as doomed to fail from the start.

130 We find, for example, the technique of generalizing from one (usually negative) example (see p.307) also with regard to positive deeds: when Suetonius talks about candidates for whom there was not yet room in the senate and who were hence given charge of legions as compensation for the postponement and delay (Suet. *Ner.* 15.2), Suetonius seems to be generalizing from a single case of the year 60 CE; see Kierdorf 1992, 179.

131 Later, we find a similar mixture of (some) good and (prevailing) bad traits of Nero and

If we recall the officially positive aspects of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian in Suetonius, the list is not short: the description of Tiberius' early principate (*Tib.* 26–37) includes examples of *civilitas*, *humanitas*, *species libertatis*, and *moderatio*. In the account of Caligula, the focus is on his popularity (*Calig.* 15–16), his consulships (*Calig.* 17), and his games, spectacles, and buildings (*Calig.* 18–21). Nero is praised for his virtues of *pietas*, *liberalitas*, *clementia*, and *comitas* (*Ner.* 9–10), for several *spectacula* including the *Iuvenalia*, the *Neronia*, and the reception of Tiridates in Rome (*Ner.* 11–13), for his consulships (*Ner.* 14), several juridical and administrative acts, including building works (*Ner.* 15–17), as well as for not extending the Empire and for his journeys (*Ner.* 18–19.2). Domitian's rather positive deeds comprise his *spectacula*, including feasts (*Dom.* 4), his public buildings (*Dom.* 5), his wars or war-like events (*Dom.* 6), and his administration (*Dom.* 7–9).

When we look at this list it is remarkable that some topics are part of the positive section—even if they could have been presented more positively or if they are later re-coded. The potential overstepping of normative and social borders is not explicitly pointed out here. Suetonius is following panegyric more than historiography when he presents the section on public entertainment among the virtues of these emperors: the passage on Nero's *spectacula* (*Ner.* 11–13) picks up and illustrates Nero's virtues of *liberalitas* and *clementia* (*Ner.* 9–10). Suetonius lists several details here that are regarded as negative in Tacitus and Cassius Dio:[132] Suetonius' Caligula has senators appear as charioteers (*Calig.* 18.3); Suetonius' Nero includes old men of consular rank and old women of superior rank (*senes quoque consulares anusque matronas*) as participants in his *Iuvenalia* (*Ner.* 11.1). Men and women from the two highest orders participate in his *ludi maximi* (*Ner.* 11.2). Senators and knights take part in gladiatorial games (*Ner.* 12.1). Vestal virgins are among the spectators during the athletic contests at the *Neronia* (*Ner.* 12.4). But their participation is never evaluated negatively and there are no hints that these emperors forced anyone to take part in their performances.[133] Even the often criticized *Neronia*, the games established by Nero which carry his own name and in which he won several

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Domitian, in particular at the beginnings of their reigns, in Aurelius Victor (*Caes.* 5.1–4; 11.3). See also Ps.-Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 5.1–4; 11.1–3.

132 See Devillers 2009, 62–63; 67; 69 on the difference between Suetonius and the historiographers Tacitus and Cassius Dio as regards Nero's games.

133 Likewise, in the positive description of Tiberius' early reign there is a passage on the behaviour of women and young nobles that crosses accepted social and moral norms (*Tib.* 35). But Tiberius is not held responsible for it. They are married women of noble families, who prostitute their chastity, and young persons of the senatorial and equestrian order, who voluntarily assume the status of the legally infamous; they are thereby trying to elude the

prizes, are mentioned here. Suetonius defends listing Tiridates' visit to Rome among Nero's *spectacula* (*non immerito inter spectacula*, *Ner.* 13.1). He also mentions here that Nero was acclaimed "Imperator" for this (*ob quae imperator consalutatus*) and that he closed the gates of the temple of Janus—as though, to add a negative twist however, there were no war being waged (*tamquam nullo residuo bello*) (*Ner.* 13.2). All this is included among Nero's positive deeds. Similarly, Nero's poetic compositions, which are harshly criticized by Tacitus, are evaluated positively by Suetonius: Nero is defended against the reproach that he transcribed or took his poems from another's dictation; Suetonius' Nero worked out his verses with thought and creativity (*ut facile appareret non tralatos aut dictante aliquo exceptos sed plane quasi a cogitante atque generante exaratos*, "so it is shown clearly that his verses were not transcribed or taken from another's dictation but worked out with thought and creativity", *Ner.* 52).[134] The whole rubric on Nero's *liberalis disciplinas* (*Ner.* 52) is not negative.[135]

It is also remarkable, from a historiographical point of view, that Suetonius lists Domitian's *spectacula* (*Dom.* 4) among his positive deeds. This even includes alleged innovations (*praeter sollemnes … cursus*, *Dom.* 4.1) and some typical panegyrical elements.[136] Some aspects are harshly criticized and deconstructed in other texts, such as his obstinacy in staying in the theatre (*Dom.* 4.2).[137] His dating of the Saecular Games in the tradition of Augustus, not of Claudius (*Dom.* 4.3), associates him implicitly and positively with the former. Even his dress at the Capitoline games (sandals, a Greek toga, a golden crown with the images of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva) is listed here, which might have invited strategies of negative coding, such as ascribing foreignness and the claim to divinity: *certamini praesedit crepidatus purpureaque amictus toga Graecanica, capite gestans coronam auream cum effigie Iovis ac Iunonis Minervaeque* (*Dom.* 4.4). If Suetonius mentions it here "to impress on his readers Domitian's travesty of normality",[138] we should not forget that it is still in the context of Domitian's more positive deeds. Even more striking than the inclusion of *spectacula* among the virtues is the positive section on Domitianic *clementia* (*Dom.* 9.1–3; cf. *Dom.* 10.1), a virtue that the last Flavian is certainly

ban on senatorial and equestrian performances on stage or in the arena. For historical details cf. Lindsay 1995, 127.

134 Cf. Mart. 8.70.8 for a positive evaluation of Nero as poet.

135 On Nero's artistry as a potentially positive element of his reign cf. Pausch 2013, 47–50.

136 For panegyrical texts on Domitian's games see, e.g., Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.85–90; 1.6.53; Mart. *Spect.* 6; Mart. 5.49.8–9; Mart. 8.50.7–8 and p.69–70.

137 Cf. a different version of Domitian staying in the theatre in Cass. Dio 67.8.2–4 and p.215; 225.

138 Jones 1996, 45.

denied by Tacitus and Cassius Dio. His *abstinentia* is underlined twice when Suetonius points out that there was scarcely any suspicion of greed or avarice (*cupiditatis quoque atque avaritiae vix suspicionem ullam*, *Dom.* 9.1) and that he gave firm evidence not only of self-restraint but even of liberality (*non abstinentiae modo sed etiam liberalitatis experimenta*, *Dom.* 9.1).

In such positive passages, imperial representation and actions are praised or approved either directly or indirectly. Tiberius for example, at the beginning of his principate, declines all sorts of honours that could be associated with tyranny and accepts only a few modest ones: *ex plurimis maximisque honoribus praeter paucos et modicos non recepit* (*Tib.* 26.1). Caligula is *nullius non boni exempli fautor* (*Calig.* 16.4), the promoter of every good example. Suetonius even defends Caligula against accusations that he took up his third consulship because of pride or lack of care (*superbia neglegentiave*, *Calig.* 17.1). An indirect way to praise these emperors' behaviour is to show them acting in ways atypical of a tyrant. Suetonius is then drawing on (*topoi* of) tyrannical behaviour, but shows an emperor who does *not* act that way. Thus Suetonius' Caligula allows the writings of Titus Labienus, Cremutius Cordus, and Cassius Severus, which had been banned by senatorial decree, to become obtainable again, to be owned, and to be read repeatedly (*Calig.* 16.1). Among the imperial actions that are praised in these sections, there are actions that are explicitly described as innovations and which therefore have great potential to attract criticism. Even Caligula's pontoon bridge is introduced as *novum praeterea atque inauditum genus spectaculi* (*Calig.* 19). Suetonius discusses different reasons for this form of representation, which are all rational and do not involve an interpretation of Caligula as excessive or mad.

And Suetonius includes other, positive traditions about emperors in his work which have not found the approval of the historians.[139] His Nero does explicitly receive a good funeral (*Ner.* 50). In his final death notice of Nero, Suetonius states that there was great public joy (*Ner.* 57.1); however, he also admits that Nero was still honoured by several people for a long time (*et tamen non defuerunt qui per longum tempus vernis aestivisque floribus tumulum eius ornarent*, "and yet there were also people who for a long time would decorate his tomb with spring and summer flowers", *Ner.* 57.1), which makes Nero's attempts at *popularitas* (*Ner.* 53) appear not to have been in vain. Some decorated his tomb with flowers, displayed statues of him on the rostra, posted his edicts (*Ner.* 57.1).

139 For another text presenting a positive image of Nero among the contemporary elite see Alcock 1994, 107 on Plutarch (*Mor. De sera* 567F–568), where the gods are said to owe Nero a kindness for his gift of freedom for *Achaia*. For positive Neronian traits in the treatise see also Sansone 1993, 185 on *Mor. De sera* 563D.

Especially the Parthians were very fond of him (*Ner.* 57.2). The biography of Nero thus ends describing groups of people who honoured Nero for several years after his death. Even the biography of Germanicus at the beginning of the *Life of Caligula* (*Calig.* 1–7), which contrasts Germanicus to Caligula, serves as an explanation for a positive image of Caligula. At the beginning of his *Life* we clearly feel the tradition of Caligula as the great hope, the son of Germanicus (*Calig.* 13; cf. also *Calig.* 9–10; 12.1; 14), who aims for *popularitas* (*Calig.* 15–16) not least by honouring his dead father, mother, and brother.

3.2 *Two Voices? On Structural Ambiguity*

3.2.1 Reading against the Rubric

Not only does this depiction of the reactions to Nero's death allow different voices and attitudes about these bad—or ambivalent—emperors to be heard. The people's behaviour after Domitian's death, too, is explicitly multifaceted and differs between social groups, according to Suetonius: the people are indifferent, the soldiers even want him to be deified, the senators are extremely happy (*Dom.* 23).[140] Such statements invite the reader to think of emperors like Nero and Domitian as not merely bad. So far, we have read their biographies as involving sections about them that are positive or at least ambiguous: not only the negative sections, but also the rubrics on positive deeds have shown the potential of deconstructing imperial representation. However, we have also seen that the rubrics on negative deeds involve an ambiguous element: in order to understand all the elements mentioned in the sections on vices as negative, we have to assume a reader who accepts the premises and logic of the text. If the reader accepts that the rubric on Domitian's *arrogantia* (*Dom.* 12.3–13) presents examples of arrogant behaviour, he or she will interpret the elements of this rubric accordingly: the element x is an example of the vice y because we read x in the rubric of y. Yet we have seen that in some cases, such as Domitian's behaviour towards Caenis and his claimed divinity, the deconstruction of imperial representation is achieved by the context and the label of the rubric rather than by the action depicted itself. The reader might be inclined not to accept an element listed in a certain rubric as an example of the virtue or vice under discussion. The reader would then not take Domitian's behaviour towards Caenis and his saying about his divine couch to be an example of Domitian's arrogance. Such a critical reading challenges the rubrics. While an affirmative reading accepts the logic of the rubric, a critical reading questions

140 The difference in the reactions is underlined by the use of superlatives (*Dom.* 23.1), cf. Mouchova 1968, 101.

whether the single elements presented are really suitable within this rubric, under this headword. A reader may also switch between the affirmative and the critical reading, and may even enjoy this tension.

A critical reading against the grain of a rubric is, to present another striking example, encouraged at the end of or following the rubric on Nero's *crudelitas* (*Ner.* 33–38). We saw that the rubric on *crudelitas* is carefully arranged and presents several amplifications, the climax of which is the Great Fire of Rome (*Ner.* 38). However, this is not the last thing we hear about before Suetonius comes to depict Nero's last days (*Ner.* 40–49). Between these two sections there is a passage that diminishes the impression of Nero's *crudelitas*.[141] It starts with *quaedam et fortuita* (*Ner.* 39.1) and does not strictly belong to the rubric on *crudelitas*, but is closely associated and connected with it. The beginning of this passage suggests that we read it as its own section: it is marked as providing additional material (*accesserunt*) and comes full circle with the beginning of the whole passage on Nero's *probra* and *scelera*, picking up these headwords (cf. *Ner.* 19.3) as *mala* and *probra* (*accesserunt tantis ex principe malis probrisque quaedam et fortuita*, *Ner.* 39.1). The depiction of Nero's misdeeds (*ex principe*), we are told, is now over. What follows are evil events that Nero is not responsible for, *quaedam et fortuita*, namely a plague, the revolt of Boudicca in Britain, and the defeat at Rhandea (*Ner.* 39.1).

This passage (*Ner.* 39) is mainly about the public criticism directed against Nero and how he dealt with it. Although the focus is on quips and pasquinades, which are to give the reader an overview of the criticism of Nero, Suetonius sets emphasis on the fact that Nero dealt relatively patiently and tolerantly with people's insults and mockery: *mirum et vel praecipue notabile inter haec fuerit nihil eum patientius quam maledicta et convicia hominum tulisse neque in ullos leniorem quam qui se dictis aut carminibus lacessissent extitisse* ("in this situation it was striking and remarkable that Nero bore nothing with greater patience than people's insults and mockery, and indeed he was especially tolerant of those who had attacked him with quips and pasquinades", *Ner.* 39.1).[142] This is all the more surprising since the examples of insults given by Suetonius and mentioned above refer to Nero's matricide and the death of Claudius, his representation as Apollo, the *domus aurea*, and his enmity towards the senate

141 Cf. Mouchova 1968, 93–96.

142 I therefore do not agree with Steidle ²1963, 90 who claims that Nero's neglect makes the misdeeds he is reproached for appear even greater: "Ebenso wirkungsvoll ist die Gleichgültigkeit gegen Schmähungen an den Schluß dieses Teiles gestellt, denn die besprochenen Greuel erhalten auf diese Weise einen noch schrecklicheren Charakter."

(*Ner.* 39.2–3). At the end of this passage Suetonius gives two different explanations for Nero's relatively mild behaviour. The first is positive and speculates that he was beyond all insults (*vel contemptu omnis infamiae*); the second, less positively though still not in a merely negative way, sees the purpose in avoiding the provocation of further witticisims by admitting his displeasure (*vel ne fatendo dolorem irritaret ingenia*) as Nero's driving motivation (*Ner.* 39.3).[143] In any case, at least from the outward appearance, by staying calm and by not regarding the insults and offence, Suetonius' Nero does indeed follow Seneca's definition of a great mind in *De clementia*: *magni autem animi proprium est placidum esse tranquillumque et iniurias atque offensiones superne despicere* ("moreover, the peculiar marks of a great spirit are to be peaceful and composed, and to disregard loftily injustice and wrongs", Sen. *Clem.* 1.5.5).

This passage (*Ner.* 39) hence presents a milder image of Nero before we hear the circumstances of his death. It weakens the strong effect of the preceding *crudelitas*-rubric and in fact of the whole section on Nero's *scelera* (*Ner.* 26–38). For a more negative picture of Nero, Suetonius could have placed this rubric at a less crucial transitional point. With its position here it slightly counterbalances and runs counter to the rubric of *crudelitas*. Two voices seem to overlap, one speaking of a cruel Nero—much louder, of course—and the other of a milder Nero. Suetonius gives us different attitudes towards Nero's behaviour.[144] There is, of course, the strong tendency showing that Nero was a bad emperor, but this tendency is not turned into a one-sided political credo. The reader is invited to listen to another voice than the official one and to accept—and to enjoy—a multifaceted literary image.

3.2.2 Ambiguous Topics

Another strategy that allows for different voices to be heard about emperors and their imperial representation and which also concerns the structure of the

143 Mouchova 1968, 95–96 also argues that Suetonius highlights Nero's *patientia* and *lenitas* and that even if Nero's reactions to these insults are not as positive as those of other Suetonian emperors (*Iul.* 73; *Aug.* 55; 56; *Tib.* 28; 59; 66) they are still not totally negative.

144 I therefore agree with Alföldy 1980–1981, 385 that Suetonius gives us a picture of "wie die Zeitgenossen das betrachtet haben, was gewesen ist"; this does not imply, however, that Suetonius is a witness for the historian who asks "wie es in der Vergangenheit eigentlich gewesen ist". Pausch 2004, 317–318 points out that Suetonius does not transmit a fixed image of an emperor to posterity: panegyrical literature cannot really be compared, and invective passages in Suetonius are often cited out of context.

biographies is the ambiguous treatment of a topic, whether it be a topic as a whole field or one specific event or act of an emperor.[145] This is a truly rhetorical technique.[146]

First, Suetonius sometimes treats topic-fields twice: the emperor is depicted as acting positively in that field when it is mentioned the first time and then as acting negatively when the topic is dealt with a second time. The same field is then used for both praise and vituperation, and similar, comparable sorts of action bring out the differences. We may look at three examples of topics that are presented twice in the biographies: Nero's conduct towards the dead Claudius; Nero's and Domitian's treatment of inheritances; and Domitian's communication with the people.[147]

Nero's treatment of the dead Claudius is first described among his positive deeds. Nero provides him with a most magnificent funeral, a eulogy, and declares him a god: *Claudium apparatissimo funere elatum laudavit et consecravit* (*Ner.* 9).[148] We learn later, in the section on Nero's *crudelitas*, that he insulted the dead Claudius (*contumeliis mortuum insectatus est*): in addition to accusing him of being stupid and cruel, making jokes about him, disregarding several of his decrees as though they had been made by someone completely mad, as was mentioned above, Suetonius' Nero provides only a low and insubstantial wall as the enclosure for the place where Claudius had been cremated (*Ner.* 33.1).

For both Nero and Domitian their treatment of inheritances is listed both among their positive and among their negative sections. On the one hand, Nero

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145 Langlands has similarly interpreted Suetonius' treatment of the contradictory tradition about Augustus "incorporating both panegyric and critical elements" (Langlands 2014, 113). She argues that "Suetonius deliberately organizes the contradictory elements of this tradition to tell us a rather poignant story about the great Augustus' failure to control his own exemplarity" (Langlands 2014, 113).

146 Cf. Lewis 1991, 3653, who speaks of a "quasi-judicial setting" consisting of "'prosecution'" and "'defence'" and points out the closeness of Suetonius to the *controversiae* of rhetorical schools (cf. Lewis 1991, 3669). Cizek 1977, 159–165 further associates the technique with the philosophy of the New Academy. See also Cizek 1977, 197: "Suétone opère avec le doute, réel ou feint, avec l'idée qu'il y a partout un côté bon et un côté mauvais et que seul le dosage diffère à telle enseigne qu'on aboutisse plutôt à des probabilités qu'à des certitudes absolues."

147 Lounsbury has shown that the motif of gold in the *Life of Nero* is ambiguous too. All the references to gold before the first mention of the *domus aurea* refer to Nero's prosperity and are positive; those that follow signify decline and collapse (see Lounsbury 1991, 3757). Suetonius picks up a motif that is purely positive in panegyrical literature (cf. Cordes 2017, 24–32) and turns it into an ambiguous topic.

148 On *ostentatio* weakening the positive aspects of Nero's behaviour see p.319.

intervenes against the forgery of testaments (*Ner.* 17), on the other hand he claims several inheritances (of ex-slaves who bore the name of any family to whom he was related, of persons who had failed to recognize their obligations to the emperor in their wills, of his aunt Domitia) for himself and the treasury (*Ner.* 32.2; 34.5). Domitian's treatment of inheritances serves as an example of positive behaviour when—earlier in his reign—he did not accept inheritances left to him by people who still had children (*Dom.* 9.2). It contrasts sharply with the later statement that he seizes estates of complete strangers if someone can be found who claims to have heard that the deceased had made the emperor his heir, which serves as an example of Domitian's *cupiditas* (*Dom.* 12.2).

Likewise, Domitian's communication with the people in the theatre is at first positive. They are given the opportunity to choose and ask for preferred pairs of gladiators (*ita semper interfuit ut populo potestatem faceret bina paria e suo ludo postulandi eaque novissima aulico apparatu induceret*, *Dom.* 4.1). This is in stark contrast to Domitian's famous order of silence, presented in the rubric of *arrogantia* (*tacere tantum modo iussit voce praeconis*, *Dom.* 13.1), which shows Domitian as forbidding communication and avoiding dialogue with the people in an extreme way.[149]

Second, the very same imperial act can be coded both positively and negatively.[150] The negative re-coding is achieved through a new piece of information, which is added to the first one. A quite simple strategy to re-code imperial representation this way is to add the information that it was too expensive. We have already seen that the relation of an emperor's actions or behaviour with their costs is used as a strategy of negative coding. What is more, this strategy is highly effective in re-coding a previously mentioned positive imperial act. Finances seem to be a good starting point for postponed criticism, since the reproach that something was too costly can easily be applied to things that are generally and otherwise considered good. The reception of Tiridates in Rome, for example, is listed under Nero's positive deeds in the context of his spectacles (*Ner.* 13.1–2), but also under negative aspects in the rubric *luxuria* (*Ner.* 30.2), where it is characterized as too expensive. Domitian's public works (*Dom.* 5), games (*Dom.* 4.1–4), and increases to soldiers' pay (*Dom.* 7.3) are mentioned as praiseworthy categories of Domitian's reign, but the three of them together are later criticized as the reason why Domitian exhausted his funds: Domitianic *cupiditas* (*Dom.* 12.1–2) is presented as

149 For spectacles in the theatre as part of the emperor's communication with his people cf. Bradley 1981, 129–130; Devillers 2009, 61.

150 Cf. Gascou 1984, 360–390, who collects instances in which the same event is mentioned twice within a biography or in different biographies.

resulting from their high expenses (*exhaustus operum ac munerum inpensis stipendioque, quod adiecerat, Dom.* 12.1). So Suetonius makes use of one and the same event or act to create both a positive and a negative evaluation. Domitian's games, for example, are, looking at the whole *Life*, neither good nor bad: they are both at the same time. Depending on the perspective, one can point out the positive aspects (*Dom.* 4; 5; 7.3) or the negative implications (*Dom.* 12.1). Suetonius evaluates the same event more than once and quite differently. This way of presenting a single event or topic twice dismembers it into several parts, which produces the—often criticized—effect that the presentation does not maintain the chronology of events and that the same events are mentioned more than once. The advantage of this style of presentation, however, is that several voices can be heard distinctly about one and the same event or topic. Suetonius thereby depicts at least partly the polyphony of attitudes and opinions about imperial representation. In these cases, the focus is more on the evaluations of an event or a topic and less on the event or topic itself.

Another kind of new information about a formerly positively coded act or behaviour by an emperor is to point out the negative motive of a seemingly positive deed. This technique is applied to Nero's buildings and to Domitian's edict concerning vines and vineyards: there is a short positive section on Nero's buildings within the city (*Ner.* 16.1). Nero's constructions are coded as positive because they provide vantage points for fighting fires and because Nero spends his own money on them. Suetonius is probably referring to buildings erected after the Great Fire of 64 CE.[151] But both aspects are deconstructed later when Nero is accused of setting this fire—the buildings provide his pretext to burn down Rome (*quasi offensus deformitate veterum aedificiorum et angustiis flexurisque vicorum*, "as if he were upset by the ugliness of the old buildings and the narrow and twisting streets", *Ner.* 38.1)—, of luxury in his building program (*Ner.* 31), and of avarice (*Ner.* 31). Domitian's edict concerning vines and vineyards, as mentioned before, is listed first among the positive deeds (*Dom.* 7.2). At that point the reader does not yet learn the reason for Domitian not persisting in enforcing the edict (*nec exequi rem perseveravit*), the reason being in order to diminish the excessive devotion to viticulture and to cut down vines (*Dom.* 7.2). We are given this reason only later in a passage discussing Domitian's growing fear before his death. The edict gets a negative twist there (*Dom.* 14.2) when Domitian is said to have renounced it above

151 Cf. Kierdorf 1992, 180.

all because he was frightened by a pamphlet alluding to him as a goat which is to be sacrificed to Bacchus.[152]

Besides later adding the costs or the emperor's motives, an imperial action can be re-coded negatively by reporting something that happened at the same time.[153] Thus Nero's Isthmus project is listed among his positive deeds first (*Ner.* 19.2) with Nero himself being the first to strike the earth with his mattock and carry off a basketful of earth on his shoulders. The project's inauguration ceremony reappears in the rubric on Nero's *saevitia* and *crudelitas*, where Nero is reproached for expressing the wish that the project may turn out well for himself and the Roman people, without mentioning the senate (*Ner.* 37.3). This, as we have already seen, is interpreted as hostility towards the senators. Similarly, an additional piece of information about Domitian's victory over Saturninus in the civil war re-codes this event. The *bellum civile* is first mentioned in the ostensibly positive rubric on Domitian's military deeds (*Dom.* 6.2). The additional information we receive later in the rubric on Domitian's *saevitia* is that this civil war made him more cruel (*Dom.* 10.5).

When providing new information in one of these three ways—high expenses, bad motives, negative simultaneous action—the new information does not contradict the first piece of information given. It rather supplements it and presents it in a new light suggested by the additional knowledge. Sometimes Suetonius goes further and presents a new version of an event presented differently before.[154] For example, there are two versions of Titus' death in the Flavian *Lives*.[155] They are part of two different *Lives* but very close to each other. In the *Life of Titus*, Titus dies of a fever; Suetonius' Domitian does not play a role in the narrative (*Tit.* 10–11). By contrast, at the beginning of the *Life of Domi-*

152 On details of this edict, which was probably motivated more by moral than by economic reasons cf. Jones 1996, 64–65.

153 A striking example is Caligula's famous pontoon bridge across the bay of Baiae. Mentioned among the rather positive deeds first (*Calig.* 19.1–3), as we have seen, it is taken up—with explicit cross reference (*Puteolis dedicatione pontis quem excogitatum ab eo significavimus, …*)—in the rubric on Caligula's *saevitia*: we receive the additional information there that he had several of the invited guests pushed into the sea (*Calig.* 32.1).

154 This technique has provoked the strongest criticism from history scholars, cf. Flach 1972, 278 on *Calig.* 15.4 (Suetonius' Caligula burns the records on the cases against his mother and his brothers so that no informer or witness would have to live in fear) and *Calig.* 30.2 (Suetonius' Caligula only pretended to do so in order to make use of this material later). Cf. Mouchova 1968, 70–71 on the same passages, who also argues that Suetonius chose two different aspects or moments of the same story to achieve different effects in two different contexts.

155 Cf. Gascou 1984, 384–386; Galtier 2009, 86–87, who compares the death of Titus to the death of Domitian; Schulz 2018, 315–316.

tian we learn that Suetonius' Domitian left Titus dying (*Dom.* 2.3). There is the not-mentioning of Domitian in the *Life of Titus* on the one hand, and Domitian's failure to render assistance in the *Life of Domitian* on the other. These two accounts are not exactly contradictory, but also not congruent.[156] We will probably understand them best if we think of their rhetorical effect on the reader. Titus is Suetonius' favourite emperor. When we recall that in antiquity death was an image of life and that the depiction of death could illuminate the essence of life in a condensed form,[157] it is probable that Suetonius wanted his favourite *princeps* Titus to receive a dignified end in his *Lives*. Any interference of Suetonius' Domitian at the end of Titus' *Life* would diminish Titus' splendour. But Domitian is, in Suetonius' view, one of the worst emperors. This is already suggested, as we have seen, at the beginning of Domitian's *Life* by pointing out the tense relationship of Domitian with his brother Titus (*Dom.* 2.3). Domitian's lack of help for the dying Titus here exemplifies his hatred for his brother. The question whether an event or parts of that event are mentioned in the text at all thus does not depend on the fact itself on which it is based but on the literary effect of the context in which it is presented.[158] A reader who searches for historical truth may be unsatisfied with this literary feature. But if the reader allows herself to be surprised during the reading process, she may enjoy the fact that her image of certain emperors does not stay fixed but changes.

3.3 *'Lost Potential': Missing Historiographical Strategies*

We have seen that Suetonius has his own specific devices to deconstruct imperial representation, which are often ambivalent, and that he shares techniques with the historiographers. We can now round off the study of Suetonian techniques by summarizing the historiographical strategies which Suetonius does *not* fully apply in his biographies. Two prominent literary features of his text, namely the focus on the emperor, which constantly keeps other figures in the background, and the preference for rubrics over narrative sections, allow a selective application of certain historiographical strategies, but not their full development. This indicates a purpose in Suetonius different from historiographical discourse.

156 Cf. also Suet. *Tib.* 73 to *Calig.* 12.2: while there are several versions of Tiberius' death in the *Life of Tiberius*, the *Life of Caligula* only mentions the version in which Caligula is responsible for the death of Tiberius.

157 Cf. Gascou 1984, 385.

158 Cf. Mouchova 1968, 76; 106, who points out that such differing passages on the same event serve the purpose of characterizing a person by showing different aspects of a personality.

To start with the first literary feature of the text, Suetonius' interest in the person of the emperor and not in his surroundings limits the use of three important historiographical techniques.

(1) First, it allows much less scope for contrast with other figures.[159] Corbulo, so important for the Tacitean image of Nero, is hence omitted by Suetonius completely.[160] We do find the technique of contrast at the beginning of the biographies, when Suetonius' Domitian, as we saw, is distanced from Vespasian and Titus (*Dom.* 1.3–2.3); the biography of Germanicus at the beginning of the *Life of Caligula* contrasts with this emperor. But in the rest of the biographies, contrasts of the emperor with other figures are not strategically used to evaluate him. The emperor is to be understood through the rubrics and by his own actions. The rubric section, though it is individually adapted to each emperor, thus makes it harder to construct types of emperors and typologies.[161] There is, however, a connection between Suetonius' Nero and Suetonius' Caligula, and between Suetonius' Domitian and his Tiberius. Nero not only recalls Caligula in his artistic and performance endeavours (*Calig.* 54–55). He is also directly associated with Caligula early on in the biography, when his teacher Seneca is said to have dreamt that he was educating a C. Caesar (*Ner.* 7.1). Suetonius adds that Nero soon proved this dream to be true, giving the first examples of his cruel nature (*et fidem somnio Nero brevi fecit prodita immanitate naturae quibus primum potuit experimentis*, *Ner.* 7.1). Suetonius' Nero, as was mentioned before, also admires his uncle Caligula for his lavishness (*Ner.* 30.1). Suetonius' Domitian recalls Tiberius implicitly, since they have in common a family policy involving their wives, the emperor, and a Julia (Augustus' and Titus' daughter respectively): they both love their wives but the emperor wants them to divorce and to marry Julia instead (*Tib.* 7.2; *Dom.* 22).[162] Suetonius' Domitian is explicitly said to have read nothing but Tiberius' notebooks and records (*Dom.* 20).

(2) The second consequence of the textual focus on the emperor is that there is much less opportunity for focalizing other figures and depicting their reactions or (negative) emotions towards the emperor.[163] Suetonius does not

159 For the historiographical technique of contrasting the emperor with other figures see p.63–64; 201–205.

160 I hence go further than Wallace-Hadrill, who explains the absence of Corbulo in the *Life of Nero* by the irrelevance of the Armenian campaigns to Nero as an individual (Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 16: "The total omission of Corbulo from the *Nero* is clearly justified by the irrelevance of Armenian campaigns to Nero as an individual.").

161 For typologies in Cassius Dio see p.249–254; 261–263.

162 See Jones 1996, 151 for this parallel between Domitian and Tiberius.

163 Townend 1967, 95 calls this focus on the emperor's point of view alone, which determines the perspective on the details of the narrative, "the law of biographical relevance". For the historiographical technique of focalization see p.121–123; 207–215.

focalize the emperor let alone other figures of his narrative, as historiographers do.[164] While an emperor's fear, as the emotion conventionally ascribed to tyrants, is depicted quite often, emotions of other people are rarely heard of.[165] Also, people's reactions to imperial representation are not often depicted. Exceptions are the section on pasquinades on Nero (*Ner.* 39.2–3), which mirrors people's attitude towards him, and the depiction of people who want to avoid Nero's performances in theatre and jump off the wall or pretend to be dead (*Ner.* 23.2). Senatorial reactions are rare and especially the topic of the relationship between imperial honours and the senate is not developed in Suetonius.[166] Arising from this lack of emotions and of the reactions of other figures, Suetonius' text does not create a distinct atmosphere the way the historiographical texts do.[167] To give but one example, the story about the treasure of Dido is used as a transition from the rubric of Nero's *luxuria* to his *avaritia* (*Ner.* 32) in Suetonius. In Tacitus' *Annals*, the story features prominently at the beginning of book 16 and illustrates Nero's growing credulity and delusion (Tac. *Ann.* 16.1–3). It there helps to bring out an atmosphere opposed to an *aurea aetas*, in which Fortuna has turned against Nero (*inlusit dehinc Neroni fortuna*, Tac. *Ann.* 16.1.1).[168]

The second predominant characteristic of Suetonius' text, the rubric structure, undermines three major historiographical devices that are based on the narrative structure of a text.

(1) First, since the elements in one rubric are not expected to be arranged chronologically, Suetonius' text cannot make effective use of the strategy of building on breaks in temporal logic or manipulate chronology.[169] We have studied the playing with time in the rubric on Domitian's cruelty.[170] But such instances are rare and only work in larger rubrics.

(2) A second historiographical feature that is not fully used by Suetonius and that also concerns the relationship of time and text is the depiction of negative dynamics.[171] Again, this device is applied only selectively in the *Lives*. It is

164 This is why, although Nero's death narrative is written from his point of view, "Suetonius refuses, as always, to enter into his character's actual thoughts" (Townend 1967, 95).

165 On fear in Nero's and Domitian's death narratives see p.295–297. On Tiberius see *Tib.* 63–66; on Claudius see *Claud.* 35–36.

166 On honours as forms of imperial representation in Suetonius see p.286.

167 See p.90–93; 245–248. Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 15 on Nero's murder of Britannicus: "Suetonius omits the scene-setting that gives Tacitus' narrative its atmosphere".

168 Cf. p.90–91.

169 For the construction of time and chronology as a means of deconstruction in historiography see p.124–127; 222–224.

170 On p.317.

171 See p.92–93 for dynamics in Tacitus.

best developed in the narrative sections such as the death narratives. We have also studied the *divisiones* and transitional statements as not referring to structure only but also to a division of and development in time.[172] Such a dynamic division on the macro-level is explicit in Domitian's case (*Dom.* 3.2; 10) and suggested in Caligula's case (*Calig.* 22.1).[173] And there is foreshadowing, i.e. references to later events[174] and developments which to a certain degree highlight the temporal structure of the text. However, within the rubrics, such dynamics are not developed but are confined to single statements. So we are told in the rubric on Domitian's outward appearance that his body became worse just like his character (*Dom.* 18.2). But this interesting parallelism and the dynamic it implies are stated just once—in the appropriate rubric, on Domitian's looks—and it is not developed within the narrative: with another text structure the reader could have learned gradually in the course of a narrative when which part of his body deteriorated in what way.

There is one exception, which we have already hinted at: Suetonius sets emphasis on the dynamic development of Nero's interest in performances. Due to the presentation of this interest in several different rubrics, he repeats it several times. Nero's love of music seems to go through several stages: Suetonius' Nero was trained in music already in his childhood, among other disciplines (*inter ceteras disciplinas pueritiae tempore imbutus et musica*, *Ner.* 20.1); he listens to the lyre-player Terpnus every day late into the night; then he begins little by little (*paulatim*) to study and practise himself, even applying professional voice exercise methods. His enthusiasm as an observer turns into active performance. His voice stays thin and indistinct, but Nero is pleased by his progress (*Ner.* 20.1). And he desires to perform on stage, which he does for the first time in Naples, a Greek city (*Ner.* 20.2–3). Afterwards, he even sings in Rome and shifts the date of the *Neronia* (*Ner.* 21.1–2). There he finally makes his performances a regular event (*non cessavit identidem se publicare*, 21.2). His performances as a *citharoedus* increase in frequency and in the number and

172 On p.312.

173 The division in *Calig.* 22.1 is a structural division, not a temporal one. However, the examples of Caligula's *popularitas* in *Calig.* 15–16, the beginning of the section on Caligula's acceptable or good deeds, are—with one exception—all from the years 37/38 CE. If the reader is aware of this, he receives the impression that Caligula deteriorated relatively soon after the start of his rule (cf. Steidle ^{2}1963, 75: "Eindruck einer verhältnismäßig bald einsetzenden Verschlechterung"). For a twofold division in the *Life of Tiberius* (first up to the year 26, then Capri) see Döpp 1972, 453.

174 E.g. when we hear that Nero has melted down golden and silver statues that he took from temples, among them the Roman Penates, we also learn that they were later restored by Galba (*Ner.* 32.4).

range of their locations. Nero shows a similar development in the way he deals with his passion for chariot-driving. He starts secretly, but then shows it openly (*primo clam, deinde propalam*, *Ner.* 22.1; *neque dissimulabat*, *Ner.* 22.2). He talks about games from his earliest youth and plays with ivory chariots at the beginning of his reign (*Ner.* 22.1), then he wants to drive himself and be seen as a charioteer more often (*mox et ipse aurigare atque etiam spectari saepius voluit*, Nero 22.2). He finally expands his performances by transferring them to Greece (*Ner.* 22.3). Suetonius has to repeat the same scheme—from hidden to open performances, increasing frequency, finding new places for performances—since the performances are presented in rubrics. They are taken up at the end of Nero's *Life*, where Suetonius' Nero again expands his performance plans. People expect him to act as wrestler, to try to equal Hercules in killing a lion (*Ner.* 53). These plans of Nero are given in the section on his desire for *popularitas*. The rubric also has a chronological element, when Suetonius states that near the end of his life (*sub exitu quidem vitae*) Nero even wanted to perform as a dancer (*Ner.* 54). Nero's artistic forms of imperial representation are part of his *probra*, the dynamic development of which is underlined.

The same gradual development is highlighted for Nero's *scelera*, presenting the five vices of *petulantia*, *libido*, *luxuria*, *avaritia*, and *crudelitas* (*Ner.* 26.1). Suetonius reports an apparent development in Nero's behaviour. At first he exercised these vices only gradually and secretly, like the flaws typical of young people (*sensim quidem primo et occulte et velut iuvenili errore exercuit*, *Ner.* 26.1). But even then, so Suetonius, everyone should have realized that they were vices of his nature and not of his age (*sed ut tunc quoque dubium nemini foret naturae illa vitia, non aetatis esse*, *Ner.* 26.1). They get stronger (*paulatim vero invalescentibus vitiis*) and, as mentioned above, he no longer cares to conceal what he does and breaks into the open with worse crimes (*Ner.* 27.1).

(3) The repetition of the same structure of development illuminates how Suetonius has to talk about the same dynamics (in music, chariot-driving, crimes) several times because—and this is the third implication of the rubric section—there is no master narrative as in historiography, which would show the dynamic developments of the main points of criticism following chronology. In Nero's case there is at least emphasis on his artistry, the main component of the Neronian historiographical master narratives, although it is not criticized thoroughly and completely as long as Nero does not plan to perform as or even become a professional artist himself.[175] The help he offers during and after the Great Fire is coded negatively because it overlaps with the motif of his

175 Cf. Pausch 2013, 52–62 on this important distinction in Suetonius.

artistry, which is integrated into the narrative (*Ner*. 38.3). But for Domitian the deconstruction of his military endeavours, and (related to this) the presentation of *simulatio* as a trait of character and behaviour, which are default elements in the historiographical deconstruction, play only a minor role (Suet. *Dom*. 2.2; 11.1–3).[176] Both appear selectively but are not used to develop a negative master narrative.

176 As regards Domitianic topics, Suetonius does not mention Earinus, Domitian's ten-year consulship, or his perpetual censorship, which all feature in Cassius Dio (cf. Jones 1996, xiii). According to Charles 2006, 86 Earinus is left out because the story was not negative for Domitian. But see p.209 for a negative version in Cassius Dio.

CHAPTER 11

Deconstructed Elements and Miscellanism

1 Beyond Tacitus and Cassius Dio: Suetonian Deconstruction and the Historiographical Discourse

We have seen in the previous chapter that Suetonius' deconstruction, his way of creating a negative picture of Nero and Domitian based on positive or neutral interpretations, is, compared to the historiographical approach represented by Tacitus and Cassius Dio, not fully developed. It creates various, multi-faceted images of eccentric emperors and their imperial representation. These findings about Suetonian deconstruction are closely connected with the question of how political a work Suetonius' *Caesares* is.

We have seen that Suetonius evaluates emperors according to certain morals and values. To put it simply, virtues make a good emperor, vices a bad one.[1] The four most important virtues in Suetonius are "clemency, civility, liberality and the restraint of luxury and lust".[2] Given this set of virtues Suetonius is neither neutral nor indifferent; his work is not without moral categories altogether. He has his own opinion about each emperor and his imperial representation, which he communicates explicitly and implicitly, as we have seen. The reader is not simply left alone to make sense of Suetonius' account and to draw a conclusion himself.[3] However, Suetonius' (and the reader's) opinion does not have to be one-sided. Rather, it integrates different perspectives and voices, which may create an ambivalent picture especially of emperors with eccentric forms of representation. Such an evaluation is still building on explicit and implicit ideological ideas about the Roman emperor.[4] But it also diminishes the work's didactic force:[5] it does not aim to persuade either its readers or an emperor how to behave. Models of behaviour play only a subordinate role;[6] and they do not aim to educate the *princeps*. Just as the *Caesares* are not paraenetic, they are not

1 Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 145.
2 Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 152.
3 I am hence not following Townend 1967, 92–93; Ektor 1980; Sonnabend 2002, 176–177.
4 Cf. Steidle ^{2}1963, 66–67.
5 Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 24; Bradley 1991, 3713: "Suetonius certainly makes extensive use of moralistic categories, the virtues and vices of the emperors, but he makes no attempt to educate his audience in the familiar manner of the historian proper."
6 Cf. Pausch 2004, 318, comparing Suetonius to Plutarch.

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critical of the dynasty in power either. The attempt to detect subtle criticism of Nerva and Hadrian in Suetonius has been rightly refuted.[7]

We can conclude that in Suetonius, deconstruction or deconstructed textual elements appear in a de-politicized form. Suetonius and his way of deconstruction exhibit no political purpose and so differ clearly from a senatorial viewpoint. Suetonius' attitude in general and his view of imperial representation is non-senatorial.[8] This helps us to understand differences between Suetonius and the historiographers in evaluating imperial representation,[9] and ties in well with the fact that in Suetonius the senate (and the people) are objects of imperial actions and plans, but not depicted as agents taking the initiative themselves.[10] Suetonius' work is loyal to the principate.[11] The ideal of the principate of Trajan and Hadrian appears to be accepted,[12] but Suetonius is not an organ of their imperial ideology.[13] Furthermore, Suetonius does not aim to write philosophy of history.[14] Instead of regretting that Suetonius was not another Tacitus, some readers have even welcomed this different, non-moralistic approach of the biographer.[15]

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7 For an interpretation that detects criticism of the dynasty in power see e.g. Abramenko 1994. Explicitly against such interpretations are Gascou 1984, xiv; 676; 711; 771–773; Wardle 1998, 432–438; Jones 2002, 239. See also Baldwin 1983, 386 and Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 200 against specific allusions to the reign of Hadrian.

8 This does not have to be explained as a specifically equestrian view, however. Such explanations (esp. by Della Corte 1958; Cizek 1977; Lambrecht, 1984, 157; 533) have rightly been criticized e.g. by Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 74–78 and Lewis 1991, 3525: we do not know what exactly it meant to be part of the *ordo equester* at Suetonius' time, and an equestrian attitude did not necessarily always have to be distinct from the elite as a whole.

9 E.g. Devillers 2009, 64–66 explains the difference between Suetonius' ambiguous evaluation of Nero's games and the historiographers' exclusively negative evaluation of them on the basis of the latter's senatorial viewpoint (Devillers 2009, 66): "Suétone ne partage donc pas la perspective anti-impériale et sénatoriale qui anime Tacite et a influencé Dion Cassius."

10 Cf. Alföldy 1980–1981, 378, who, with regard to this role of the senate and people in Suetonius, detects a difference between the *Life of Caesar* and the other *Lives*: "und während Senat und Volk in der Caesarvita bei verschiedenen Handlungen die höchste Autorität und Macht verkörpern, ergreifen sie später kaum andere Initiativen mehr als zur Ehrung der Herrscher (…); vielmehr sind sie Objekte kaiserlicher Handlungen oder Pläne".

11 Cf. Bradley 1985, 265.

12 Cf. Lambrecht 1984, 81–82; 158.

13 Cf. Wilson 2003, 531. For example, Wilson sees "no Trajanic or Hadrianic propaganda to account for the blacker tones of the portrait of Domitian" (Wilson 2003, 532).

14 Cf. Pausch 2004, 317.

15 Cf. Alföldy 1980–1981, 353, distinguishing Suetonius from Sallust and Tacitus: "Und schließ-

Suetonius and his manner of deconstructing imperial representation form part of the historiographical discourse—he treats the same subject—but differ from the works of Tacitus and Cassius Dio to a certain degree. I would finally like to argue that these differences can be understood better by studying the similarities that Suetonius' *Caesares* exhibit with other branches of literature, in which he goes beyond Tacitus and Cassius Dio: second-century miscellanism and first-century encyclopaedism.

2 Between Pliny the Elder and Aulus Gellius: Suetonian Deconstruction and the Non-historiographical Discourse

2.1 *Miscellany Literature and Suetonius' Second Century*

To situate Suetonius' deconstruction in the generic discourse of miscellany and encyclopaedic literature, we will first define this sort of literature in general, then focus on the second century as the peak of miscellany literature, and study Suetonius' relationship with it. We can then analyse three main features of miscellany literature and their relation to Suetonian deconstruction: the ordering of knowledge; active readers; and the combination of information and entertainment. This analysis will be based on a broad perspective. To understand the structure of Suetonius' miscellanistic features in the *Caesares* he will be compared to Pliny the Elder, who wrote about a generation before him and was the uncle of his friend and supporter Pliny the Younger, and to Aulus Gellius, who wrote around two generations later than Suetonius.[16] Although Gellius draws on both Pliny's and Suetonius' works (*historiae naturalis … pratum*, Gell. *NA* praef. 8) I do not claim a linear, evolutionary development from Pliny the Elder through Suetonius towards Aulus Gellius, and I am not looking for specifically Hadrianic or Trajanic aspects of Suetonius' work.[17] The exact chronology is less important than the intermediate position of Suetonius between these two authors in generic terms, not just chronological ones. The comparison of

lich unterscheidet sich Sueton von den großen Historikern Roms wie Sallust oder Tacitus geradezu wohltuend: Er ist kein pessimistischer Moralist oder moralisierender Pessimist."

16 Already Funaioli 1931, 610 connected the two works: talking about anecdotes, legends, and personal experience in Suetonius' *De viris illustribus* he remarks that his work "steht im Einklang mit dem Zeitgeschmack: man denke nur an ein Werk wie die Noctes Atticae des Gellius". On the dating of the *Noctes Atticae* see Holford-Strevens 2003, 16–21.

17 Cf. Bradley 1985, 258, who criticizes Wallace-Hadrill 1983 for focusing too much on Hadrianic elements in Suetonius and less on Trajanic aspects: "the tastes to which W.-H. looks in evaluating the *Caesares* are those of the generation of Fronto and Gellius (…), a generation well beyond the reign of Trajan".

Suetonius' *Caesares* with both miscellany and encyclopaedic literature allows rather for a structural analysis that sets deconstruction and deconstructed elements of imperial representation in Suetonius into another context than the historiographical one.

The genre of 'miscellany literature' or *Buntschriftstellerei* is a modern invention.[18] It is closely related to the encyclopaedic genre. In their study of encyclopaedism in the Roman Empire Jason König and Greg Woolf understand miscellanistic literature as part of encyclopaedic literature.[19] Encyclopaedism has two extremes poles, one being single-subject treatises, the other being miscellaneous works. Single-subject works are, for example, Varro's *On agriculture* and works on universal history.[20] Miscellaneous works are, for example, Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* and a number of sympotic works such as Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* and Plutarch's *Sympotic questions*. The *exempla* tradition, for example Valerius Maximus' *Memorable deeds and sayings*, is also related to miscellany literature.[21] In the middle of the spectrum König and Woolf locate encyclopaedic works in the stricter sense, such as Varro's *Antiquities*, Celsus' *Arts*, and Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis historia*.[22] The concept of a broad spectrum with two poles underlines that there are no clear-cut boundaries between the different works.[23] There is rather a set of shared features—approaches, claims, motifs, ambitions, techniques—that all these otherwise various works have in common and that they use and manipulate to a greater or lesser degree.[24] They are all "linked in some way with the idea of comprehensive and systematic knowledge-ordering".[25] From a sociological viewpoint they can all be understood as responses to a growing world of books from the late Republic and early Empire onwards.[26]

18 German scholarship introduced this term, inspired by Aelianus' ποικίλη ἱστορία, cf. Bowie 1997, 850. It has been taken over by anglophone scholarship, which also uses the expressions 'miscellaneous' or 'miscellanistic literature' as well as 'miscellanies' and 'miscellanism'.

19 See König/Woolf 2013.

20 Cf. König/Woolf 2013, 49–52. There has also been an increase in modern scholarship on such ancient scholarly or technical literature, see, e.g., the volume edited by Horster/Reitz 2003 and the volume edited by Fögen 2005 with a focus on ancient technical literature on medicine, grammar, and commentaries.

21 Cf. König/Woolf 2013, 52.

22 Cf. König/Woolf 2013, 37–44 for the middle of the spectrum.

23 Cf. König/Woolf 2013, 58. Gellius' preface, for example, "resists any sharp separation between 'miscellanism' and encyclopaedism" (König/Woolf 2013, 55).

24 Cf. König/Woolf 2013, 23; 49.

25 König/Woolf 2013, 23.

26 Cf. König/Woolf 2013, 29–37; 48.

If we try, however, to differentiate more clearly between encyclopaedic treatises in a narrow sense and miscellanies, we could say that encyclopaedic works "purport to offer a systematic and comprehensive account of the state of knowledge in a defined range of subjects", whereas miscellanies "purport neither comprehensiveness nor systematic arrangement, but rather present their readers with a muddled series of isolated discussions of particular issues belonging to a large variety of fields".[27] Suetonius' *Caesares* may, then, be located somewhere in the middle between encyclopaedic works such as Pliny's *Naturalis historia* and miscellaneous compilations such as Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*. But before we focus on this intermediate position of the *Caesares*, we should characterize Suetonius' relationship with the miscellanistic discourses of his times more generally.

Writing in the early second century Suetonius stood at the beginning of the heyday of miscellanistic literature.[28] He was deeply embedded in the imperial bookworld, the fruitful basis for encyclopaedic and miscellaneous compilations: Suetonius had three important imperial positions closely related to the world of learning. Under Trajan and Hadrian he held the administrative offices *a studiis*, *a bibliothecis*, and *ab epistulis*. He was hence responsible for research on scientific and literary texts that the emperor needed in order to take his decisions, for the supervision of the libraries in Rome, and for the imperial correspondence, perhaps even for the emperor's speeches.[29] These positions allowed him access to various books, documents, and letters, which he was able to use for the composition not only of the *Caesares*, but also of an encyclopaedic-miscellanistic work called *Pratum* (*Meadow*), the one cited by Gellius (*NA* praef. 8). It has not survived; attempts to reconstruct it are merely suggestions.[30] Its precise encyclopaedic or miscellanistic character is therefore impossible to define.[31] Also the exact or even relative dating with reference to Suetonius' other works necessarily remains an unsolved issue. But the very existence of this multi-volume work and some titles of Suetonius' works which may have been part of the *Pratum*, such as *On games*, *On the institution of offices*, *On Rome and its customs*, *On physical defects*, *On names for clothes*, *Lives*

27 Vardi 2004, 165–166.

28 An overview of miscellanistic literature in the second century (including Gellius) is provided by Steinmetz 1982, 275–291.

29 See Fein 1994, 159–162. On the difficulties of defining the tasks of these offices precisely see Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 83.

30 See the edition of Reifferscheid 1860, and a new suggestion for a reconstruction by Schmidt 1991.

31 Cf. König/Woolf 2013, 54: "It is unclear what claims, if any, it made to be comprehensive or authoritative".

of the courtesans,[32] illuminate Suetonius' interest in writing miscellanistic and encyclopaedic literature. And Suetonius was not the only one to combine a historiographical or biographical interest with miscellanistic and encyclopaedic writings. Pliny the Elder, for example, not only wrote the *Naturalis historia* but also the important *Historia a fine Aufidi Bassi*.[33] Plutarch wrote moral biographies and sympotic miscellanies.

The following discussion of miscellanistic and encyclopaedic elements in Suetonius builds on studies that have situated Suetonius in the literary and social discourses of the second century more specifically. First, Suetonius' work has been characterized as that of a second-century scholar and antiquarian.[34] Text features such as his interest in details and daily life, which are considered typical of the antiquarian method, are also characteristic of miscellaneous literature.[35] Second, Suetonius' biographies have been analysed as testimony to the interest in biographical information and so as part of the second-century discourse on learning and education. Dennis Pausch has shown that the second century was eager to communicate biographical knowledge and to create literary images of personalities: Suetonius exhibits this interest, as do Pliny the Younger and Aulus Gellius.[36] Lives of illustrious men take on a function similar to episodes and anecdotes about famous people in the *exempla*-tradition, which associates Suetonius with authors such as Valerius Maximus and Velleius Paterculus.[37] They communicate knowledge and hence overlap with the features of miscellanistic literature. Suetonius presents his knowledge in a schol-

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32 Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 48 and Schmidt 1991, 3800. Schmidt 1991, 3821 gives the following titles in his new reconstruction of twenty books of *Pratum*: *De Roma* (two books), *De genere vestium*, *De institutione officiorum*, *Historia ludicra* (two books *De spectaculis*, one book *De lusibus puerorum*), *De anno Romanorum*, *De naturis rerum*, *De naturis animantium*, *De regibus*, *De libris*, *De viris illustribus* (two books *De poetis*, one book each of *De historicis*, *De oratoribus et philosophis*, *De grammaticis et rhetoribus*), *De notis*.

33 A third similarity between Suetonius and Pliny the Elder is the praise of Titus, to whom Pliny the Elder dedicates his *Naturalis historia*, written under Vespasian. Cf. also, more generally, Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 28: Pliny the Elder and Suetonius both combine dedicated service to the emperor and prolific literary output.

34 See e.g. Leo, 1901; Funaioli 1931, 614; Flach 1972, 287; Baldwin 1983; Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 46.

35 For example, Suetonius' interest in the use of *praenomina* (Gnaeus and Lucius) in the family of the Domitii (Suet. *Ner*. 1.2; Suetonius may be following a family history, see Kierdorf 1992, 155) illuminates Suetonius' antiquarian method and interest, but could also be found in a miscellaneous work, if we think e.g. of Gellius' interest in family members and relationships in *De genere atque nominibus familiae Porciae* (Gell. *NA* 13.20). Cf. the brief family history of the Claudii at the beginning of the *Life of Tiberius* and Suetonius' interest in the *praenomina* used within the family (*Tib*. 1.2).

36 See Pausch 2004, e.g. 262; 266.

37 Cf. Pausch 2004, 171; 267.

arly, though not a strictly technical style.[38] In the context of the stylistic trends of the second century,[39] he can be classified as a classicist.[40]

2.2 *Ordering Knowledge*

Encyclopaedic and miscellanistic literature share a specific method of collecting, choosing, and presenting information:[41] the narrator presents his work as one that starts with extensive reading and note-taking. Based on his notes and excerpts the author chooses which information he wants to share. These isolated pieces of information, which are de-contextualized from their original content and fragmented, are then re-ordered and integrated into a new structure. This structure is brought out by navigational aids such as tables of content, chapter headings, and cross-references, and it is supported by a lucid and simple style. Pliny the Elder and Gellius are very similar with regard to the first step within this process of ordering knowledge, namely the gathering of information. Both of them read extensively and draw on a rich basis of books (Gell. *NA* praef. 2; Plin. *HN* praef. 20), from which they take excerpts. But they differ in the way they then select and re-order their material. Pliny has a subject, namely nature, whereas Gellius decides what he integrates into his work not by topic, but by interest. While Pliny's order follows distinct subjects, Gellius claims to arrange his topics just in the way he comes across them. He strives to *avoid* a perspicuous scheme.[42] He points out his *ordo fortuitus* and makes *disparilitas* and variety programmatic for his content and structure (Gell. *NA* praef. 2–3).[43] Both authors draw attention to their structure and make it clear by adding a table of contents and chapter headings or summaries respectively.[44] They are constantly present in their texts through authorial interjections, cross-references, or references to themselves.[45] The style is pur-

38 On Suetonius' style cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 19–22; Fry 2009; Damon 2014, 42–48.

39 See Steinmetz 1982, 28–30 on Quintilian's (Ciceronian) classicism, the followers of Seneca's 'modern style', and archaism.

40 Cf. Leeman 1963, 366; Cizek 1977, 195; Pausch 2004, 263.

41 Cf. König/Woolf 2013, 36.

42 This does not mean, however, that the *varietas* is not artfully constructed, cf. Steinmetz 1982, 281–287 and Vardi 2004, 170 for "deliberate disruption" in Gellius' arrangement.

43 Cf. König/Woolf 2013, 54; Pausch 2004, 154–155.

44 Even if we have to be careful and not read these lists of contents as if they were a modern table of contents (see Doody 2010, 110–131 for Pliny's *summarium*), such overviews certainly help the reader to find certain pieces of information.

45 Pliny underlines his authority on content and morals as well as his scientific ethos, cf. Fögen 2009, 258.

posefully clear in Pliny the Elder (*dilucide atque perspicue*, *HN* 18.274) and more elaborate than is typical of Roman scholarly works in Gellius.[46]

When we compare Suetonius to these techniques of ordering knowledge, we can see that Suetonius collected his material in a similar way.[47] Suetonius reunites within his text, as encyclopaedists do, "materials otherwise scattered through many others".[48] The author sometimes mentions his sources, especially the non-literary ones such as letters, hearsay, or his own experience.[49] Thus Suetonius points out his own eyewitness status regarding an incident concerning the *Iudaicus fiscus* that proves Domitian's *cupiditas* (*interfuisse me adulescentulum memini*, *Dom.* 12.2). He refers to himself when he mentions the false Nero of 88/89 CE (*adulescente me*, *Ner.* 57.2). He cites his grandfather as a source or as transmitting a source regarding Caligula's pontoon bridge (*avum meum narrantem puer audiebam*, *Calig.* 19.3); he cites elderly people (*a maioribus natu audiebam*, *Claud.* 15.3) for the advocates' abuse of Claudius' patience; and his father (*pater meus*, *Oth.* 10.1) as a source for Otho's attitude towards civil war.[50] Suetonius also points out that he himself read unpublished, less official sources, for example letters (*rescripsit his verbis*, *Ner.* 23.1). When he defends Nero's compositions, which he decides not to deconstruct, as we have seen, he reveals that he himself studied Nero's own notebooks and writings in the emperor's own hand (*Ner.* 52).

The encyclopaedic and miscellanistic approach of excerpting strongly resembles Suetonius' *Zettelkastenverfahren*.[51] The rational fashion of Suetonius' structure and his way of presenting his material can be located somewhere in the spectrum between the encyclopaedist and the miscellanist. Suetonius itemizes knowledge too and gives a new structure to his particles of knowledge. The scholarly and the rhetorical approach here go hand in hand.[52] His method of re-contextualizing in rubrics information on a certain topic, namely

46 Pliny cares less about the perfection of his style, and more about general understanding, cf. Nikitinski 1998, 355. For Gellius cf. Holford-Strevens 2003, 64.

47 Cf. Power 2014a, 12, who detects "some continuity in the methods of gathering information for both his scholarly and biographical projects", which further supports the close connection between the *Caesares* and Suetonius' encyclopaedic-miscellanistic works.

48 König/Woolf 2013, 35.

49 Cf. Stevenson 2004, 134–138 on the methods Suetonius shares with the antiquarians.

50 Duchêne 2016 has collected instances in which Suetonius draws attention to his own persona. I do not agree, however, that these instances aim to construct the persona of an authorial historian and that he "had the same subject, goals and method as 'regular' historians" (Duchêne 2016, 272).

51 Cf. König/Woolf 2013, 45.

52 Cf. Lounsbury 1987, 21 about the opposition 'rhetorician vs. scholar' in general: "To recover the rhetorician is not to dismiss the scholar. The two are not incompatible".

emperors,—including deconstructed elements of imperial representation—resembles Pliny the Elder more than Gellius. Pliny's structure is clearer and more analytical, Gellius' structure is less discernible than Suetonius'. It is easier to find a certain piece of information in Pliny, and more difficult to find it in Gellius. In the surviving text, Suetonius does not set out a table of contents, as both Pliny and Gellius do.[53] But his rubrics, which recur in a certain, though not strict order, with their headwords at the beginning, allow a convenient scanning of the content.[54] We can find the section on Nero's *crudelitas* and Domitian's *opera* quite easily. Similarly to Gellius, such text entities can be associated with and refer to each other.[55] We can, for example, easily compare Nero's *crudelitas* to Domitian's *saevitia*, emperors' public forms of entertainment, or their death scenes, as we have done in the previous sections. When we thus search the text for answers to questions such as "How did Nero and Domitian die?", "What was the imperial representation of an emperor like in public spectacles?", "How arrogant was an emperor?", the rubrics and narrative passages can be understood as answers to implicit questions. When we read Suetonius' text this way, it also exhibits a relationship with the *quaestiones* literature, a genre that consists of questions and answers, and which can also be considered part of the encyclopaedic tradition.[56]

2.3 *Active Readers*

Encyclopaedic and miscellaneous works require an active reader, someone who creatively makes use of the knowledge presented, who transfers it to another setting, or adapts it for new intellectual purposes: the readers of such works are "encouraged to engage with their contents by means of criticizing, supplementing, expanding, adapting, and reconfiguring them".[57] We can, in general, distinguish two aspects of such an active reading process. The first refers to the relationship of a work to other works. The bulk of second-century literature only came into being because there was already an enormous amount of literature, which called for complementary or subsidiary works such as com-

53 Tables of contents in works that present knowledge had become more common and popular in the first century CE, see Pausch 2004, 68–69 and Bodel 2015, 28–36, and Gibson 2014, 38–55 and Bodel 2015, 23–28 for an index to the letters of Pliny the Younger.

54 Cf. Pausch 2004, 264.

55 Cf. Pausch 2004, 228.

56 See Oikonomopoulou 2013 on Plutarch's surviving corpus of (originally thirteen) *quaestiones* (*Natural questions*, *Greek questions*, *Roman questions*, *Platonic questions*, *Sympotic questions*) as part of the encyclopaedic tradition.

57 Oikonomopoulou 2013, 153.

mentaries.[58] The reader of encyclopaedic and miscellanistic works is invited to use them as a starting point for actively consulting these other works.[59] The second aspect of active reading is confined to the work itself: encyclopaedic and miscellanistic works can be read either consecutively or selectively. Pliny the Elder and Gellius both require an active reader, but in different ways.[60] Pliny the Elder's reader may read parts on specific topics, which are easy to find, but Pliny also tries to make things easier for a reader who wants to read longer passages or the whole work.[61] The work engages with the reader not least in moral digressions.[62] It is written for a Roman audience, by a layman for other laypersons, who do not require any knowledge: *humili vulgo scripta sunt, agricolarum, opificum turbae, denique studiorum otiosis* ("it was written for the common herd, the mob of farmers and of artisans, and after them for students who have nothing else to occupy their time", Plin. *HN* praef. 6).[63] Gellius, by contrast, writes for a reader who already has some knowledge and who wants to complement it and to make use of it in the right way (Gell. *NA* praef. 12–16).[64] His reader is supposed to evaluate and contextualize correctly the fragments of knowledge presented.[65] Beate Beer has thoroughly analysed the construction of Gellius' implied reader in the preface to the *Noctes Atticae*.[66] Since the narrator mostly does not comment on what he says and does not evaluate his information explicitly, the reader has to get involved in his text: he has to supplement the rest and make sense of what he reads.[67] Beate Beer describes this kind of strong reader demanded by the *Noctes Atticae* as a trait of the Second Sophistic:[68] he is 'activated' by intertextual references to Pliny's preface, by open-ended lists, and pieces of information that have to be supplemented, and by bringing together disparate text passages.

58 Cf. Pausch 2004, 333.

59 Cf. Oikonomopoulou 2013, 150: "A key characteristic of the ancient miscellanistic text is that it looks outside itself to a larger sum of knowledge that can be explored and captured in textual form".

60 For Plutarch as an encyclopaedist who requires an active reader see Oikonomopoulou 2013, 151.

61 Cf. Nikitinski 1998, 353.

62 Cf. Nikitinski 1998, 352.

63 Cf. Nikitinski 1998, 345; 358; Fögen 2009, 214.

64 Cf. Pausch 2004, 160–161.

65 Cf. Pausch 2004, 155.

66 See Beer 2014.

67 Cf. Beer 2014, 51; 55.

68 Cf. Beer 2014, 64–68. She compares Gellius to Philostratus and his *Eikones*, "die den Leser zur Hypothesenbildung über den Fortgang des Textes aktivieren und mit Blick auf den Erzähler die Illusion einer Performanz eines Sprechers hervorrufen" (Beer 2014, 67).

We find similar strategies in Suetonius' *Caesares*. Their implied active reader shares some characteristics with Pliny's and some with Gellius' reader and is somewhere in the middle between them, but closer to Gellius than to Pliny.[69] Like Gellius' reader, Suetonius' reader is supposed to have some knowledge of other works, especially of annalistic historiography, of Tacitus and Aufidius Bassus as well as of Pliny the Elder.[70] Suetonius' *Caesares* are subsidiary literature in the sense that they assume an implied reader who has other works he can consult when he searches for more thorough information.[71] Writing "non-history" Suetonius is not another Tacitus, but a supplement to Tacitus.[72] So we can suppose that a reader of the rubric on Domitian's *saevitia* may compare annalistic historiography for the dates of death of Domitian's victims.[73] And the fragmentation of Nero's journey to Greece will be understood differently by a reader who has previously read a continuous account of this journey in another work.[74] As regards active reading only of the *Caesares* themselves, they can of course be read consecutively.[75] Such a reading has its advantages, especially since there is no table of contents: we have seen that sequential reading provides the reader with an evaluation through disposition and order. Especially the ambiguous topics challenge the reader and invite her to ponder and to think further.[76] But a selective reading of Suetonius' biographies is possible too, thanks to the rubric structure and the headwords that provide orientation—more than in Gellius, less than in Pliny.[77] Such a reading associates Suetonius' *Caesares* more closely with Velleius Paterculus and the collections of *exem-*

69 Konstan 2009, 460, too, argues that the reader has to engage with the text, to challenge and to ponder it. Comparing Suetonius to Plutarch's *Vitae Parallelae* he states: "Such an active engagement with the text is all the more required in the case of Suetonius."

70 Cf. Steidle ^{2}1963, 87 on *Calig.* 60; Flach 1972, 277; Pausch 2004, 32.

71 Cf. Pausch 2004, 227.

72 For the term "non-history" see Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 9.

73 See p.317 for the dates of death in this section.

74 See p.276–277 for the fragmentation of Nero's journey to Greece in Suetonius.

75 Steidle seems to consider this as the only correct way of reading the *Caesares*; see Steidle ^{2}1963, 73 on *Calig.* 12: "Die übrigen Versionen von Tiberius' Tod sind hier nicht erzählt, was sich daraus erklärt, daß die Viten nicht als Einzelstücke, sondern als zusammengehörige Teile eines Ganzen gedacht sind. Aus Auslassungen bzw. Ergänzungen bei der Darstellung gleicher Gegenstände in verschiedenen Viten geht das klar hervor."

76 Cf. Stevenson 2004, 139 on the accumulation of several explanations as an antiquarian trait: the "unwillingness to commit oneself to a particular view or explanation" and the "accumulation of several explanations can be detected in Suetonius, Pliny, Verrius Flaccus, Varro". Enenkel 2003, 171, comparing the *Life of Augustus* to merely panegyrical literature similarly argues that Suetonius' ambivalent image of Augustus creates an interesting text which makes the audience both enjoy and question it.

77 This is also pointed out by Pausch 2004, 263; 332–333; cf. Pausch 2013, 47.

pla, for example, of Valerius Maximus, which also invite selective reading.[78] A selective reading works best with an active reader who is aware that the process of selection, which has produced the rubrics, is an evaluative process: the reader can understand the product of this process better if he knows other works and reads Suetonius as subsidiary literature. By aiming at such an active reader, Suetonius' ideal audience must be similar to Gellius': a broad but educated audience, or an audience interested in knowledge and education—elites and those who aspired to join them by learning something about Roman history.[79]

2.4 *Information and Entertainment*

The reader of miscellanistic and encyclopaedic literature expects to receive not only knowledge and education but also pleasure and entertainment. The texts respond to the different interests of their readers, they disregard everything that is canonical, and prefer rare, funny notices and stories.[80] Both Pliny and Gellius criticize mere school knowledge and a know-it-all-attitude.[81] Pliny the Elder points out the utility of his encyclopaedic work *Historia naturalis* in its preface (*utilitatem iuvandi*, Plin. *HN* praef. 16).[82] He refuses to integrate into his work digressions and fantastic elements for entertainment (Plin. *HN* praef. 12).[83] Much more than Pliny, Gellius links education and utility with entertainment. He strives to present his knowledge in an entertaining form. Instead of completeness Gellius offers "isolated facts and self-contained discussions that should retain the reader's interest by brevity and variety".[84] His varied order (instead of a thematic structure) follows the aesthetic ideas of second-century *delectatio*.[85] This connection of (encyclopaedic, not strictly disciplinary) education and pleasure is, again, a trait that points to the implied reader typical of the Second Sophistic.[86] The Gellian implied reader, who reads for relaxation in his leisure (Gell. *NA* praef. 1), is intended to profit from the *Noctes Atticae*, for the work "provides a preparation for the trials and tribulations of, at least,

78 Cf. Pausch 2004, 49.
79 Cf. Funaioli 1931, 622; Pausch 2004, 23.
80 The topics may still be connected to canonical elements, though, cf. Hose 2008, 185.
81 Cf. Beer 2014, 63.
82 Cf. Nikitinski 1998, 353; Fögen 2009, 206.
83 Cf. Fögen 2009, 209. Nikitinski 1998, 350 asserts, however, that Pliny's work can be read for entertainment too.
84 Holford-Strevens 2003, 29. For variety in Gellius see also Fitzgerald 2016, 187–195.
85 Cf. Pausch 2004, 157.
86 Cf. Beer 2014, 65; 67.

social, dinner-party chit-chat, if not public life".[87] The active reader learned "from the text how to learn and display learning, and could use the varied material of the text as the starting point for a coherent and comprehensive vision of how to interact with the world and with the literary heritage of the Greek and Roman past".[88] He had a role model in Gellius who presents himself as a successful example of a social career that is based mainly on cultural competence and communication skills.[89]

With Gellius aiming at entertainment combined with education and Pliny stressing the usefulness of what he does, Suetonius is, again, in the middle between the miscellanist and the encyclopaedist, and, again, closer to the miscellanist.[90] Suetonius does not aim only to order knowledge, he also strives to entertain his readers.[91] He achieves this by applying some of the mechanisms typical of second century miscellanistic literature. Thus Suetonius shows a strong interest in details. These may be trivia, which are not only important for understanding someone's character (cf. Plut. *Alex.* 2), but also for entertainment. Some of the detailed pieces of information that he presents may seem superfluous, which attracts the readers' attention—an encyclopaedic trait.[92] Or, the information given appears difficult to acquire, and hence precious. Like encyclopaedic authors, Suetonius then presents himself "as heroic explorer (…) of the bookworld, bringing back precious nuggets of information and organizing them in a rational fashion for the benefit of fellow Romans".[93] This responds to the curiosity of the audience.[94] Suetonius' interest in Caligula's birthplace provides an example of this entertaining interest in details (*Calig.* 8). Similarly, when he deconstructs Nero's chariot-driving by telling us that, in Olympia, Nero drove a ten-horse chariot, although he had himself reproached the king Mithridates for this in one of his own songs (*Ner.* 24.2), he integrates into his text an otherwise lost "precious nugget" of information that sheds lights

87 Stevenson 2004, 153.

88 König/Woolf 2013, 57.

89 Cf. Pausch 2004, 151–152.

90 However, entertainment was also one of the purposes of historiography, see Tac. *Ann.* 4.33.3 on the *minimum oblectationis* that Tacitus' themes offer.

91 Entertainment as the main purpose of the *Caesares* has been suggested e.g. by Bradley 1985, 260: in his review of Baldwin 1983 and Wallace-Hadrill 1983 he remarks that sheer entertainment should not be entirely rejected as the value of Suetonius' *Caesares*, since "the biographies are worth reading on the simple level of human interest".

92 On things that seem superfluous in an encyclopaedic work and the reader's attraction to them cf. Nikitinski 1998, 357.

93 König/Woolf 2013, 45.

94 Cf. Pausch 2004, 320.

on Nero's character. Suetonius presents such information in small pieces, as encyclopaedic literature does.[95] And he integrates narrative, stylistically pleasing passages, especially anecdotes, which were a popular form of narrative in the second century and which enhance the entertainment-value of the work.[96] Such smaller narrative forms are also convenient to memorize and hence useful for repetition.[97]

Suetonius considers this kind of memorable, entertaining knowledge to be useful for his reader, as his focus on the reader's present moment clearly indicates. It is apparent in his several references to present times, on geographical subjects, biological subjects, philological subjects, institutions, or laws.[98] It also shows in his interest in objects that link the past with the present. Objects 'condense' stories, they stand for and represent narratives, as does for example Nero's bracelet (*aurea armilla*, *Ner.* 6.4). Suetonius uses the object, the bracelet, to expand the stories behind it. He integrates the *aes* depicting *Nero citharoedus* into his text as an example of material remains that has survived down to his own times at the end of the depiction of Nero's trip to Greece (*Ner.* 25.2).[99] The image of Nero the artist is here 'materialized' in the statues and the coin depicting him in this role and mentioned in the text. With regard to places Suetonius almost writes a kind of imperial tourist guidebook: the reader learns of places he can visit (e.g. *Tit.* 1.1), he even receives directions, for example to imperial birthplaces.[100] Occasions in which a second-century reader can display this kind of learning are occasions in which general education matters—or everyday situations in which he wants to elaborate on someone's golden bracelet or a place he passes. These are situations in which the reader himself is to become an entertaining conversation partner:[101] an informal discussion, a *convivium*,[102] a public performance[103] such as a declamation.[104]

95 Cf. Nikitinski 1998, 357 for encyclopaedic literature.

96 On anecdotes and smaller, pleasing pieces of narrative in the second century cf. Pausch 2004, 317; 331–332; on anecdotes contributing to entertainment cf. Pausch 2004, 228, and Murphy 1991, 3791 for anecdotes in Suetonius' Flavian *Lives*.

97 Cf. Pausch 2004, 274.

98 Cf. Abramenko 1994, 82–84.

99 The coin depicting Nero as *citharoedus* is said to have shown the same image as statues of Nero singing to a cithara. The coins with this image that we know of were minted before Nero's journey to Greece (cf. Kierdorf 1992, 195). See also Pausch 2013, 60; Wolters/Ziegert 2014, 52–53; Cordes 2017, 128–129.

100 Cf. Wardle 1998, 427–428, who compares Suetonius to a "tourist guidebook".

101 Cf. Pausch 2013, 71.

102 This is mirrored in Gellius' descriptions of reading and intellectual conversation as forms of dinner entertainment in his *Noctes Atticae*, see Johnson 2010, 127–129.

103 Cf. Pausch 2004, 329.

104 Cf. Beer 2014, 61.

Three textual elements that we have discussed in the context of Suetonian deconstruction may have been suitable not only for entertainment but also for such situations, in which the reader wanted to display his communication skills and his knowledge: witty remarks, synchronicities, and the topic of memory.

(1) When we think of dinner-parties, eloquent talks or declamation, the witty remarks that Suetonius likes to present may have been used in or adapted to a specific situation. This applies, for example, to the joke about Sporus and Nero's father: if only Nero's father had had a wife like Nero's wife, namely a eunuch! Then, we have to understand, Nero would not have existed (*extatque cuiusdam non inscius iocus bene agi potuisse cum rebus humanis, si Domitius pater talem habuisset uxorem*, *Ner*. 28.1). We can well imagine that this joke could be reused with slight modifications for someone else who was fond of eunuchs. A creative reader may use it as a model for adapted witty remarks of his own.

(2) Suetonius' interest in synchronicity provides knowledge useful for smart remarks too. Suetonius says, e.g., that Nero's birth (*Ner*. 6.1) took place nine months after Tiberius' death, Claudius' birth on the day when the first altar for Augustus was erected (*Claud*. 2.1), Vespasian's birth five years before Augustus' death (*Vesp*. 2.1), that Nero died on the same day of the year that he killed Octavia (*Ner*. 57.1).[105] The reader is invited to think of similar synchronicities regarding events relevant to his own situation and surroundings. Someone who offers such surprising and entertaining pieces of information appears both knowledgeable and witty.

(3) Finally, the motif of 'memory' and 'the emperor destroying memory' must have been a suitable conversation topic in the second century. According to Suetonius, Nero took part in several artistic competitions in Greece and then tried to abolish the memory of other victors: he orders that their statues and images be overturned, dragged by a hook, and thrown into the latrines (*Ner*. 24.1). Domitian, as we saw above, is depicted as destroying the memory of the original builders of edifices that he rebuilds after a fire (*sine ulla pristini auctoris memoria*, *Dom*. 5). In a cultural context that was interested in preserving and presenting memory, these Suetonian elements of deconstruction could be used to display erudition and to entertain.[106]

105 For the Romans and their fascination with same-day synchronicities see, again, Feeney 2007, 158–160.

106 See Johnson 2010, 118–120 and Heusch 2011 on the relationship of *memoria* and Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*.

Conclusion to Part 4

Suetonius' biographical mode of deconstructing, of re-interpreting the imperial representation of Nero and Domitian is distinct from Tacitus' and Cassius Dio's. This mainly depends on the non-historiographical text structure of the *Caesares* (chapter 9). Suetonius' biographies are characterized by a mixture of thematic rubrics and chronological passages, which influences the methods of deconstruction (chapter 9.1). Rubrics partly overlap with topics of imperial representation, i.e. topics that are used by the emperor and others to create a certain image of him, or present virtues and vices of emperors. Within the non-temporal rubrics, elements of imperial representation, an emperor's actions, and events appear in a fragmented and re-contextualized form (chapter 9.2).

Suetonius' rubrics mainly determine his strategies of deconstruction, which can be distinguished into three different groups: historiographical techniques (as applied by Tacitus and Cassius Dio), typically Suetonian techniques, and ambivalent techniques (chapter 10). First, Suetonius shares several techniques of deconstruction of imperial representation with the historiographical discourse. 'Deconstruction' is for that reason still a valid term even for the biographer's work. He has the same focus on Nero's artistry and Domitian's arrogance. He also clearly points out their transgressions, and codes certain aspects of imperial representation and behaviour as negative: they feature as mad, unmanly, foreign, not funny, too expensive; the reasons explaining imperial representation appear as wrong, inappropriate and trivial, and as only personally motivated; imperial behaviour and representation are depicted as antisocial. In the narrative sections on Nero's and Domitian's deaths, the structure of which is closer to historiography, Suetonius picks up motifs from his rubrics and integrates them into a coherent narrative, in which space is used to illuminate each emperor's character (chapter 10.1). Second, the effect of the rubric structure becomes apparent in particular in a set of techniques that are typical of Suetonius, i.e., which are applied by him more often, more intensely or exclusively compared to the historiographical discourse. In this sense, Suetonius further develops the strategies of deconstruction. These Suetonian techniques of deconstruction include the suggestion of structural points of comparison between two or more emperors, the coding through rubrics, their disposition, and the device of amplification: the rubrics invite the reader to compare emperors with regard to specific elements and topics of their reign, for example their military projects, their physical appearance, their *crudelitas*. Rubrics code the elements they present by labelling them with biased headwords and by partially selecting (and omitting) suitable elements.

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Both the order of the elements within a rubric and the disposition of several rubrics guide and influence the reader. The text is carefully structured, to which explicit divisions draw attention, so as to assess the single textual elements (both items within a rubric and rubrics as a whole) and to lend unity to the parts and the whole of a *Life*. Devices of amplification and crescendo, again both within the rubric and in a group of rubrics, support Suetonius' statements about imperial representation (chapter 10.2). Third, based on this analysis some techniques in Suetonius are to be described as ambivalent and no longer as 'historiographical strategies': they do not allow for a fuller form of deconstruction in the way we find it in Tacitus and even more in Cassius Dio. The most obvious device for creating ambivalence is the inclusion of the virtues of bad emperors in their biographies. These virtues are often undermined and made less prominent than the vices—just as vices of good emperors are marginalized or legitimized. But the rubrics on *virtutes* still draw attention to the positive elements of Nero's and Domitian's reigns and representations. In fact, we are presented with two voices on Nero and Domitian, one proclaiming they were bad emperors, and one admitting positive traits. Once the reader accepts the latter voice he or she may even read some elements of imperial behaviour and representation included in a negative rubric critically against this rubric. In Suetonius, the critical and the affirmative discourse are much closer to one another than in Tacitus and Cassius Dio. It adds to this ambivalence that topics which feature in two rubrics or passages may be dealt with from different perspectives and be framed in diverse ways. We can, finally, see that deconstruction is not played out to the fullest in Suetonius by noting the historiographical strategies that do not occur in his biographies. Contingent upon the literary features of the *Caesares* we largely lack contrasts with non-imperial figures and (embedded) focalization, as well as the textual creation of an imperial atmosphere. The (non-temporal) rubric system gives less opportunity for effective manipulation of chronology within a narrative, for the depiction of dynamic developments, and for the creation of master narratives, in particular concerning Domitian (chapter 10.3).

This mixture of strategies argues for a reading of Suetonius as a thoughtful but apolitical writer who picks up deconstructed elements of imperial representation and integrates them into a text that aims at instruction and entertainment (chapter 11). Elements of imperial representation appear in a depoliticized form, compared to Tacitus and Cassius Dio (chapter 11.1). Suetonius' mode of deconstruction rather shares several literary features with the miscellany and encyclopaedic literature of the first and second century CE. The *Caesares* and their mode of deconstruction can be positioned between the works of Pliny the Elder and Aulus Gellius, an encyclopaedic and a miscel-

lanistic author, as regards three central features of encyclopaedic-miscellany literature. First, like these authors, Suetonius participates in a discourse about ordering knowledge; his strategies of collecting, selecting, and presenting items of knowledge are similar to those of the encyclopaedist and the miscellanist. Second, comparable to Pliny the Elder and even more to Aulus Gellius, Suetonius' implied reader is an active recipient of the information he is given. He can, third, make use of this information also for purposes of educated entertainment in the context of social events such as the *convivium* (chapter 11.2).

PART 5

Conclusion

Three Modes of Deconstruction

This study has analysed the literary images of Nero and Domitian in Tacitus' *Annals* (as well as his *Agricola* and *Histories*), Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, and Suetonius' *Caesares*. It argues that these three text corpora deconstruct the imperial representation of Nero and Domitian in three different modes, i.e. they re-shape their imperial images to negative effect, reacting to positive or neutral interpretations in three distinct ways. Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius all take part in the negotiations over the memory of the last Julio-Claudian and the last Flavian emperor: while the literature during their lifetime developed panegyrical motifs about their imperial representation, the critical literature after their death deconstructs these positive depictions and creates negative images. I understand these two distinct ways of speaking about Nero and Domitian as part of two different discourses (and not as directly representing historical 'facts'): an affirmative discourse, which is prevalent while these emperors still lived, and a critical discourse that is dominant *post mortem*. Panegyric is the main literary medium of the affirmative discourse, as historiography is of the critical discourse. Pragmatic discourse analysis is thus the overarching theory at the heart of this study.[1] The literary quality of each work has been characterized by analysing the rhetorical strategies of the text and the narratological devices applied, which are all conceived as forming part of the process of deconstruction. Additionally, I have drawn on theories about the creation of uncertainty or ambiguity in texts and on the interpretative approaches taken in memory studies.

We can conclude that Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius share several literary strategies when they deconstruct the imperial representation of Nero and Domitian, i.e. the way they showed themselves as emperors and the way they were depicted by others as emperors in different media and in different areas such as military actions, building programmes, and divinity. But in applying these strategies the three authors achieve different effects. We can distinguish three modes of deconstruction.[2] Cassius Dio presents the most complete form of deconstruction of imperial representation: he uses all the strategies available, applies them most often, and does not doubt or relativ-

1 See p.38–39.

2 Individual summaries of the results drawn from the analysis of each author are provided on p.164–166; 264–265; 355–357.

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ize them.[3] We have seen, for example, that the metaphor of the emperor's role-playing, the reproach that the emperor does things that he himself officially forbids, and the combination of the techniques of focalization with those of gendering and ethnicizing are most important in Dio. Among the extant Roman historiographical-biographical texts, his version of Nero and Domitian is the most negative. Dio's pervasive use of strategies of deconstruction creates typologies of bad emperors that lead from the early imperial period to his own times. His mode of deconstruction is closely intertwined with the sociopolitical discourses under the Severans: Dio's typologies offer an alternative, opposing reading to the genealogies claimed by the Severans, which were an important part of their own imperial representation.

Tacitus' mode of deconstruction is not characterized by the same completeness and trust in the strategies applied. It is, rather, accompanied by the effect of uncertainty: just like other literary principles and mechanisms in Tacitus, techniques of deconstruction too are often destabilized and challenged. Nero and Domitian are clearly negative figures in Tacitus too, but the Tacitean strategies that create uncertainty prevent the effect of 'closure' that one experiences when reading Cassius Dio. The active reader is rather invited to construct and question his interpretations of the events and the forms of imperial representation depicted. Compared to Cassius Dio and Tacitus, Suetonius' mode of deconstruction is unpolitical. It informs and entertains at the same time, including explicitly positive material on the two emperors, notwithstanding their overall assessment as bad. Suetonius draws on several historiographical strategies, but not on all of them. And he combines them with strategies characteristic of his biographical text structure, which makes the text ambivalent. The biographer presents deconstructed elements of imperial representation in a textual form in which they are fragmented and re-contextualized. This kind of presentation is closely connected to other literary discourses, such as the itemizing and ordering of knowledge, and the combining of information and entertainment.

To illustrate how these three modes and the strategies of deconstruction are applied differently in Cassius Dio, Tacitus, and Suetonius, we may study the narrative function of the rain at Britannicus' funeral in the three texts. Cassius Dio makes most use of the rain to deconstruct Nero's behaviour and actions. He contends that Nero murdered Britannicus by means of poison (τὸν δὲ Βρεττανικὸν φαρμάκῳ δολοφονήσας ὁ Νέρων) and that, when Britannicus' skin became

3 For equally negative depictions of Nero and Domitian see Eutropius (Eutr. 7.14; 7.23) and Orosius (Oros. 7.7.1–13; 7.10.1–7).

discoloured due to the poison, he smeared it with gypsum (ἐπειδὴ πελιδνὸς ὑπὸ τοῦ φαρμάκου ἐγενήθη, γύψῳ ἔχρισεν) (Cass. Dio 61.7.4). When Britannicus' dead body was carried through the Forum a heavy rain occurred, which washed the gypsum off while it was still moist (ὑετὸς δὲ διὰ τῆς ἀγορᾶς αὐτοῦ διαγομένου πολύς, ὑγρᾶς ἔτι οὔσης τῆς γύψου, ἐπιπεσὼν πᾶσαν αὐτὴν ἀπέκλυσεν, Cass. Dio 61.7.4). Dio here assigns a narrative function to the rain: it clearly reveals and literally de-tects Nero's crime. The rain provides new evidence for what people thought already: thanks to the rain, Nero's crime was known not only by what people heard, but now also by what they saw (ὥστε τὸ δεινὸν μὴ μόνον ἀκούεσθαι ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁρᾶσθαι, 61.7.4). Cassius Dio makes full use of the narrative element of the rain as clearly deconstructing both Nero's behaviour and any alternative (official) version that claimed Britannicus had died a natural death.

In Tacitus, the rain at Britannicus' funeral does not reveal Nero's crime. The Tacitean Nero does not smear Britannicus' poisoned body with gypsum to conceal his murder, but he is still depicted as clearly responsible for the crime (Tac. *Ann.* 13.16.1–4). Tacitus' Nero organizes a modest funeral, for which the preparations had already been made, in the same night that he has Britannicus killed (*nox eadem necem Britannici et rogum coniunxit, proviso ante funebri paratu, qui modicus fuit*, Tac. *Ann.* 13.17.1). We are told that he was buried in the Campus Martius and that there were violent rainstorms. In fact, these rainstorms were so violent that the people believed they were a sign of the wrath of the gods against Nero's crime (*adeo turbidis imbribus, ut vulgus iram deum portendi crediderit adversus facinus*, Tac. *Ann.* 13.17.1). Whereas Dio's version of the rain focuses on (scientific) proof, Tacitus' version creates a dark atmosphere in which people have to cite the anger of the gods to explain what is happening. Thus far, it seems apparent that the crime of Tacitus' Nero, although not exactly provable, is detested even by the gods. However, this certainty about the interpretation of the murder of Britannicus is, in a typically Tacitean twist, destabilized by an additional qualification of the *facinus*. The fratricide was a crime, we learn, that even many people could forgive, when they took into account the ancient disunions between brothers, and the indivisibility of monarchical power (*facinus, cui plerique etiam hominum ignoscebant, antiquas fratrum discordias et insociabile regnum aestimantes*, Tac. *Ann.* 13.17.1). The deconstruction of Nero's fratricide by means of the rain as revealing the gods' wrath to the people is accompanied by the uncertainty about this very interpretation, brought about by a general human understanding of the rivalry and murder of brothers.

We find several of these historiographical elements in Suetonius, including the rain at the funeral. But the biographer uses the rain rather to inform, in line with the rubric that presents it. Suetonius treats Britannicus' murder

and funeral under *crudelitas/saevitia* (Suet. *Ner.* 33–38), after Nero's conduct towards Claudius and before the matricide. We are reading it as an example of Nero's cruelty when Suetonius depicts the swiftness and simplicity with which Nero buried Britannicus. Part of this impression of cruel behaviour towards the dead Britannicus is the heavy rainfall occurring at his funeral: *postero die raptim inter maximos imbres tralaticio extulit funere* (Suet. *Ner.* 33.3). In Suetonius, the rain has no narrative purpose and it is not meaningful in any other way: it does not prove the crime as in Dio nor reveal divine wrath to the people as in Tacitus. It only adds to the scenery of a funeral that exemplifies Nero's cruelty.

The example of Britannicus' funeral in Cassius Dio, Tacitus, and Suetonius illuminates how narrative elements such as 'there was heavy rainstorm at Britannicus' funeral' are less important for these texts as historical facts than as functional elements among the strategies of deconstruction. The dominance of the literary strategy over the historical fact is particularly apparent in cases in which the authors apply the same strategy and refer to the same historical fact, but arrive at different literary versions. We have studied an example of such a divergence in the treatment of Nero's reasons for murdering Paris.[4] Both Suetonius and Cassius Dio use the strategy of 'personalizing' the emperor's reasons in order to deconstruct his conduct, but they devise two different personal reasons. Suetonius' Nero kills the actor Paris because he wants to get rid of a rival (Suet. *Ner.* 54). Again, this ties in with the context of the Suetonian rubric in which it is presented, which is on Nero's wish for *popularitas* and eternal fame. In Cassius Dio, however, Nero murders Paris because he wants to learn from him how to dance, but is not capable of doing so (Cass. Dio 62[63].18.1). This version fits well with Dio's wholly negative view of Nero's artistic achievements in general. Likewise, we have seen that the literary strategy moulds historical facts in the deconstruction of Domitian's triumphs as bogus triumphs.[5] Tacitus (Tac. *Agr.* 39.1), Cassius Dio (Cass. Dio 67.4.1; 67.7.4), and also Pliny the Younger (Plin. *Pan.* 11.4; 16.1–3; 17.4) may not be referring to the same triumph that was supposed to be the fake one, but they all use the same strategy of deconstruction, which is to deny Domitian's victory and to accuse him of hypocrisy.

As in the case of Domitian's triumphs, strategies of deconstruction most often do not deny the factual status of a form of imperial representation: the triumph was there, visible on the surface. They rather draw on the ambiguity of all imperial representation, which allows both for a positive coding in

4 See p.292–293.
5 See p.61–63.

panegyrical discourse and for a negative coding or critical re-coding in historiographical discourse. By recombining several re-coded elements, the critical texts also create a new imperial atmosphere. This is achieved by the description and arousal of negative emotions, but also, in particular in Cassius Dio's most complete mode of deconstruction, by satirical elements in the text and by the depiction and arousal of laughter. There is only one exception in which the deconstruction consists mainly (but not exclusively) in the factual denial of a form of representation simply by not mentioning it in the texts: these are the building projects of Nero and Domitian, which are rarely dealt with and are mostly passed over in silence in the texts.[6]

There is, however, a remarkable difference in the use of strategies of deconstruction as regards the personalities of Nero and Domitian. They are mainly criticized for forms of historical imperial representation that differ clearly from each other. This difference also influences the kind of literary deconstruction to which each is subject: Nero's artistic efforts offer more opportunity for direct criticism than Domitian's military endeavours.[7] On the one hand, the texts in both cases underline and make use of the performative character of these forms of imperial representation. On the other hand, Nero's imperial representation could be taken as what it was—the performance of an artist, interpreted as being of low quality and as being at odds with the role of the emperor. Domitian's imperial representation, however, which lay much more comfortably within the traditional range of imperial duties, had to be framed as a fake performance.

This ties in with another crucial difference, which regards the reproach of *simulatio*: while Domitian is constantly accused of *simulatio* by the historians, Nero does and says what he thinks. The concept of *simulatio* is needed for the deconstruction of Domitian's military forms of imperial representation. We can also see this, *ex negativo*, when we recall that the reproach of *simulatio* is not fully developed for the Suetonian Domitian and is not linked to his military achievements in the *Caesares*.[8] This is partly to be explained by Suetonius' own interests and literary features, but partly, and more specifically, by Suetonius' lack of interest in military topics.[9] Since his focus is not as much on the deconstruction of military forms of imperial representation as is the case in Tacitus and Cassius Dio, he does not have to develop the reproach of *simulatio* to

6 On the connection between silence and forgetting see Gowing 2005, 76: "silence is explicitly identified in Roman thought with the act of negating memory". See also p.66–67; 236–237.

7 See p.36–38.

8 See p.338.

9 For Suetonius' lower level of interest in political-military aspects see Pausch 2004, 272.

the same degree needed by the historiographers. This also accounts—again, together with Suetonius' other literary techniques—for the minor role that the device of focalization plays in the *Caesares*.[10] The historiographical works proper need to use focalization for the deconstruction of both Nero and Domitian. The historiographers make use of a large variety of focalizations to construct subtle and complex texts that aim at a certain interpretation of historical events. In Domitian's case, historiographical deconstruction styles the focalization of his own thoughts, which shows that he thinks and feels differently from how he acts. This divergence makes his *simulatio* more plausible. In Nero's case, embedded focalization, in particular through the eyes of the people, supporters of the historical Nero, is more effective. He himself is depicted most of the time as doing what he thinks and feels. But the perspective on these acts is deconstructed by presenting other people's view of them.[11] The different depictions of Nero's and Domitian's performances, the varying use of the reproach of *simulatio* and the various applications of the narratological technique of focalization thus provide excellent examples of how historical imperial representation influences literary deconstruction in Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius.

10 See p.335–336.
11 See p.121–122; 211–215.

APPENDIX

Deconstruction and Rhetorical Strategies

Shared Rhetorical Background

Whereas the main differences between the three modes of deconstruction were highlighted in the concluding chapter, this Appendix draws attention to their most crucial common ground. All the literary strategies that are applied to deconstruct imperial representation are based on rhetorical strategies. We have seen this implicitly throughout the study; this Appendix will make the rhetorical strategies explicit. It complements the conclusion offered in the last chapter by looking at the results of this study from a strictly rhetorical perspective and by asking which general rhetorical strategies underlie the techniques of deconstruction analysed in this book (in particular in chapters 4, 7, and 10).

Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio, who all received rhetorical training and were familiar with the theory and practice of rhetoric, adapt rhetorical measures in various ways, but the underlying principles—the rhetorical operations—are the same. My analysis of historiographical strategies deployed against Nero and Domitian as rhetorical strategies builds on the branch of scholarship that has shown that Roman historiography cannot be separated from rhetoric.[1] The study of connections between historiography and rhetoric most often takes the form of analysing speeches in historiographical works. My approach is broader: I read historiography and biography as persuasive genres that aim to make their accounts plausible. Their presentation is also directed against other versions of the same topics and personalities, especially in the form we find them in panegyrical discourse. To achieve plausibility for its own version of Nero and Domitian, historiography draws on genuinely rhetorical devices. The most important of these are strategies of character depiction, strategies of biased *narratio*, and strategies of invective.[2]

1 See, in particular, Dunkle 1971; Plass 1988; Woodman 1988; Marincola 1997; Baltussen 2002; Laird 2009.

2 I have used the translations of Rackham 1942; Hubbell 1949; Radice 1969; Russell 2001 for the rhetorical works dealt with in this chapter.

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Character Depiction: *Topoi a Persona*, Semantic Non-Ambiguity, *Probabile e Vita*

For persuasive character depiction, which is a crucial strategy of historiographical deconstruction, rhetoric provides lists of character qualities. They may be used by orators and historians to find both positive and negative attributes of a person. These so-called *topoi a persona* are highly important for character depiction in the *status coniecturalis*, i.e. when a speaker has to argue whether a certain person committed a crime or not, and in the *genus demonstrativum*, i.e. when a speaker has to praise or to vituperate against a person. A general division of such personal traits is that between *animus*, *corpus*, and *extra posita/extraneae res/externa*.[3] In the *De inventione*, for example, Cicero gives the following list of personal attributes, which he elaborates later (Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 1.34–36): *ac personis has res attributas putamus: nomen, naturam, victum, fortunam, habitum, affectionem, studia, consilia, facta, casus, orationes* (Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 1.34).[4] Attributes of persons according to Cicero are thus someone's name, nature, manner of life, fortune, habit, feeling, interests, purposes, achievements, accidents, and utterances. Additionally, Quintilian mentions elements of praise that are based on the time before the person was born such as *patria*, *parentes*, *maiores*, as well as *omina*, prophecies, and oracles (Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.10–11). We have seen that historiography makes use of such *topoi* to discredit an emperor and to assign negative features to him. To mention only a few examples, Nero's artistic interests, his *studia*, are deconstructed throughout. Cassius Dio uses the *nomen* of Caracalla against this emperor: by calling him by his nicknames "Tarautas" or "Caracallus" instead of his dynastic name "Antoninus", he deprives him of his genealogy. In Suetonius, some *topoi* appear as headwords for rubrics such as the emperor's remarkable sayings, his *orationes*, *omina*, or—in particular in Nero's case—the *maiores*, who foreshadow Nero's bad behaviour at the very beginning of the biography.

Once the orator or writer has found a certain character trait to talk about there is usually a variety of words which could refer to this character trait. Rhetoric clearly advises that the character trait be expressed in biased, advantageous terms. Quintilian suggests that if the orator has to reply to a *narratio* that was negative and harmful to his case, he should repeat this *narratio*, but use different terms. The orator will give different motives, a different attitude of mind, and a different interest; he will be able to extenuate some points only by a new wording: *alias causas, aliam mentem, aliam rationem dabo. Verbis elevare quaedam licebit: luxuria liberalitatis, avaritia parsimoniae,*

3 See *Rhet. Her.* 3.6.10; Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 2.177; Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.12.

4 For other lists see *Rhet. Her.* 3.6.10; Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.10–18.

neglegentia simplicitatis nomine lenietur (Quint. *Inst.* 4.2.76–77).[5] In this case, 'luxury' and 'liberality' (*luxuria* and *liberalitas*), 'avarice' and 'thrift' (*avaritia* and *parsimonia*), as well as 'carelessness' and 'simplicity' (*neglegentia* and *simplicitas*) denote the same 'facts'. But the choice of one of the two alternatives is a semantic operation that tries to make an ambivalent character trait, action, or event unambiguous.[6] The process that Quintilian describes, namely the reaction of one narration to another narration that is to be refuted, is comparable to the process of historiography deconstructing panegyrical narratives. We have seen the rhetorical process of biased wording and the production of semantic non-ambiguity, by way of example, in Suetonius' different terms for two comparable utterances by Vespasian on the one hand and Domitian on the other.[7] While Vespasian's dictum (Suet. *Vesp.* 23.4) about his divinity is termed *dicacitas* (in the corresponding rubric on banter), Domitian's utterance (Suet. *Dom.* 13.1) about his divinity is semanticized as *arrogantia* (in the corresponding rubric on arrogance). The emperor's statements about his divinity are highly ambivalent. But Suetonius' strategy of integrating them into a certain rubric under a specific headword makes them appear unambiguous.

Rhetoric closely links character depiction, which is constructed on the basis of *topoi a persona* and formulated accordingly in a convenient, biased way, with the actions described in the *narratio*. The presentation of a meaningful relationship of character to action is a central rhetorical strategy for creating plausibility, which is called *probabile e vita*. It is based on the assumption that we can explain what a person does by referring to his or her way of life and character. Cicero deals with the relationship of action, motive, and character in *De inventione* 2.32–34.[8] The motive of someone's deed (*causa facti*) has to be explained by this person's character (*animus*); this involves references to the person's way of life (*vita*) and earlier deeds (*ante facta*) (Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 2.32). We have seen that, likewise, the relationship of imperial representation to the emperor's character, way of life, and motives is crucial to negative images of emperors. The construction of motives based on character depiction, which directly or indirectly challenges the official reasons presented by the emperor, is one of the most important strategies of deconstruction.[9] To mention just one outstanding example, Cassius Dio depicts Domitian at the beginning of his reign as driven by hatred for his father

5 See also *Rhet. Her.* 3.3.6; Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.25.

6 Suetonius does so when he reframes Vespasian's greed (*pecuniae cupiditas*) as economy: *sunt contra qui opinentur ad manubias et rapinas necessitate compulsum summa aerarii fiscique inopia* ("on the other hand, some argue that the drained resources of the treasury and the imperial fund absolutely compelled him to pursue spoil and plunder", Suet. *Vesp.* 16.3).

7 See p.303–308 on Suetonius' coding through rubrics.

8 See also *Rhet. Her.* 2.2.3–2.3.5; Quint. *Inst.* 7.2.27–35.

9 See p.115–123; 198–215; 298–302.

and brother. This emotion provides the motive for Domitian's decree against castration: Dio's Domitian thereby wants to insult the memory of his brother Titus, who was fond of eunuchs (Cass. Dio 67.2.3).

Narratio: Bias, Plausibility, Chronology

The connection of causality to action is important for every rhetorical and every historiographical narrative. Rhetorical *narratio* does not aim to represent 'facts' but to construct an advantageous, biased version of these 'facts'. Quintilian points out that the *narratio* is useful for persuasion and that it sets forth an event that really happened—or that might have happened: *narratio est rei factae aut ut factae utilis ad persuadendum expositio* (Quint. *Inst.* 4.2.31).[10] The purpose of the rhetorical *narratio* is accordingly not that the judge learn the facts but to make the judge agree with the version of the facts presented: *neque enim narratio in hoc reperta est, ut tantum congnoscat iudex, sed aliquanto magis ut consentiat* (Quint. *Inst.* 4.2.21). Such a persuasive *narratio* is based on a partial selection of facts (as part of the *inventio*), a suggestive order of these facts (as part of the *dispositio*), and the correct wording and style (as part of the *elocutio*). The narrative structure of historiography draws on such rhetorical devices of *narratio*.[11] We have analysed in detail how Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius select, order, and style their material so as to design a persuasive narrative and thereby deconstruct imperial behaviour. Comparisons between the three authors, with other media of imperial representation, and with panegyrical texts have revealed these narratives to be rhetorical narratives: they present constructions of events that either happened or might have happened.

Rhetorical *narratio* with its focus on bias is hence not about truth but about plausibility. Quintilian proposes four conditions that make a narration plausible (*credibilis*): first, if we consult our own hearts so that we do not say anything contrary to what is natural (*si prius consuluerimus nostrum animum ne quid naturae dicamus adversum*); second, if we mention motives and reasons before deeds (and not all deeds, but those on which the inquiry turns) (*deinde si causas ac rationes factis praeposuerimus, non omnibus, sed de quibus quaeritur*); third, if we set up characters appropriate to the actions that we wish to be believed (*si personas convenientes iis quae facta credi volemus constituerimus*); fourth, if we specify places, times, and the like (*praeterea loca, tempora, et similia*) (Quint. *Inst.* 4.2.52). The first point is very general: things that the speaker

10 Cf. *Rhet. Her.* 1.3.4 (*narratio est rerum gestarum aut proinde ut gestarum expositio*); Cic. *Inv. rhet.* 1.27 (*narratio est rerum gestarum aut ut gestarum expositio*). See also Woodman 1988, 199–200.

11 See Lounsbury 1987, 67 for the importance of *narratio* theory for Suetonius.

contends have to be possible. Points two and three pick up the above-mentioned relationship of action to reason, and of action to character. Point four is about details of circumstances, which add to the plausibility of an account. Historiography too, although it strongly claims to tell the truth, can achieve only plausibility in its narrative accounts. The historian strives to satisfy these four qualities too. First, he should not contend things that cannot possibly be true. Whatever the figures of Nero and Domitian do, it has to be accepted as possible by the reader. Second, depictions of reasons and, third, the fashioning of characters, as we saw, add plausibility and coherence to the narratives. The same holds true, fourth, for the inclusion of details about places and times. They do not have to be true—that is, factually accurate—but they help the reader to accept a certain story. So, when the texts make Nero's performance as a singer during the Great Fire of Rome plausible, they all do so by styling a setting for this performance. But the sites are all different: Tacitus' Nero sings on his private stage (*inisse eum domesticam scaenam et cecinnise Troianum excidium*, Tac. *Ann.* 15.39.3). Cassius Dio's Nero ascends to the roof of his palace to sing there (ὁ Νέρων ἔς τε τὸ ἄκρον τοῦ παλατίου, …, ἀνῆλθε, Cass. Dio. 62.18.4). Suetonius' Nero watches the fire and sings standing on the tower of Maecenas (*hoc incendium e turre Maecenatiana prospectans*, Suet. *Ner.* 38.2). To create a credible account, the inclusion of details about the location is more important than the factual truth about the site.

Another crucial element of every *narratio* is the order in which events are described. Quintilian underlines that the *narratio* does not always have to follow the chronological order of events; from a rhetorical viewpoint events should be narrated in the order that is most advantageous for the purpose of the speech and the achievement of persuasion: *namque ne iis quidem accedo qui semper eo putant ordine quo quid actum sit esse narrandum, sed eo malo narrare quo expedit* (Quint. *Inst.* 4.2.83). In the context of *laus* and *vituperatio* Quintilian proposes a structure that presents virtues to which single actions can be assigned (Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.15). Historiography too breaks with chronology to produce a stronger persuasive effect. The extreme form of breaking with the chronology, in which topics rather than time structure the text, is found in the rubrics of Suetonius' biographies. On the other hand, chronological order can be used to suggest logical connections, as we saw in Tacitus' narrative of Nero's repudiation of Octavia. Nero drives her away on grounds of infertility, an event which is followed—and so explained—by his marriage to Poppaea: *exturbat Octaviam, sterilem dictitans; exim Poppaeae coniungitur* (Tac. *Ann.* 14.60.1).

Invective: The Commemorative Function of Vituperation

When we think of the historiographical discourse as reacting to the panegyrical discourse from the point of view of rhetorical genres, a discourse of vituperation (*vitupe-*

ratio) is reacting to a discourse of praise (*laus*). We have seen that the same element of imperial representation, for example Nero's artistic endeavours and Domitian's military projects, can appear either as *laus* or as *vituperatio*.[12] Rhetoric does not give clear guidelines for vituperation or invective. It simply defines it as the opposite of praise. Those who want to vituperate should just say the opposite of those who want to praise: *quoniam haec causa* [that is, the *demonstrativum genus*] *dividitur in laudem et vituperationem, ex contrariis rebus erit vituperatio comparata* (*Rhet. Her.* 3.6.10).[13] While invective is not an important topic in the theory of rhetoric, it plays a crucial part in the rhetorical *progymnasmata* and in oratorical practice, as Cicero's invective speeches *In Pisonem* and *Philippica 2* illustrate.[14] But we find invective elements in other literary genres too, such as comedy, satire, epodes, and Roman historiography.

Invective elements are relevant to critical historiography because they fulfil three purposes that are useful for creating negative images of emperors:

(1) Invective has a crucial non-rational feature: it stimulates emotions and entertains.[15] Epideictic speech in general aims to influence emotions gently rather than to achieve conviction and proof (*ad animi motus leniter tractandos magis quam ad fidem faciendam aut confirmandam accommodate*, Cic. *Part. or.* 71). And, as Quintilian notes discussing methods of arousing laughter, invective can be serious and brutal, or more light-hearted and funny: *intra haec enim est omnis vituperatio: quae si gravius posita sit, severa est, si levius, ridicula* (Quint. *Inst.* 6.3.37). This ties in with the historiographical feature of creating a particular atmosphere for particular reigns in the text, not least by depicting and inciting emotions.[16]

(2) Invective has a pedagogical intention. Cicero claims that the principles of praise and vituperation have a value not only for good oratory but also for an honourable life (*ac laudandi vituperandique rationes, quae non ad bene dicendum solum sed etiam ad honeste vivendum valent*, Cic. *Part. or.* 70). Quintilian more specifically claims, when talking about *progymnasmata*, that the contemplation of right and wrong moulds someone's character (*animus contemplatione recti pravique formatur*, Quint. *Inst.* 2.4.20). This pedagogical aspect fits well within the framework of the moral historiography of ancient Rome.

(3) Roman thought assigns a commemorative function to invective and praise. The Auctor ad Herennium defines as praiseworthy that which produces honourable remembrance in the present and the future: *laudabile est quod conficit honestam et*

12 For such re-interpretations see in particular chapter 3.

13 On invective as a rhetorical genre see Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.19–22 and Koster 1980, 7–21.

14 For *progymnasmata* cf. Koster 1980, 15–17 on Aphthonios.

15 Cf. Barton 1994, 58: "well-constructed invective was there to be enjoyed". See Dunkle 1967, 170 for the image of the tyrant applied in Roman invective in order to arouse emotions.

16 See p.88–93; 245–248.

praesentem et consequentem commemorationem (*Rhet. Her.* 3.4.7). In contrast to praise, vituperation is about negative memory. This is apparent in the genre of invective: when Cicero dispraises Marc Antony he aims to discredit his enemy in public forever on the basis of the currently valid norms.[17] Invective is part of the negotiation over whether a person is worthy of historical record or not; invective seeks to uncover the truth about the person: it destroys the role this person has asserted and unfolds the alternative, allegedly true knowledge about him or her.[18] With regard to this purpose, namely the negotiation of the memory of a person under criticism, invective and Roman historiography are very similar. They both enact a literary form of *damnatio memoriae*.[19] We should not think of *damnatio memoriae* as a condemnation of all memory but as a condemnation of a good or positive memory. Cassius Dio's deconstruction of bad emperors illustrates this most clearly.[20] The bad emperors should not be forgotten; their memory should be preserved in a negative form, which helps to commemorate the good emperors in a positive way.[21] Both the orator and the historiographer who make use of invective in their works are taking part in the negotiations over the memory of people such as Piso and Marc Antony, Nero and Domitian. To make their images of these personalities successful they deconstruct other, positive images through the strategies analysed in this study.

17 Cf. Koster 1980, 354 defining invective as a literary form, "deren Ziel es ist, mit allen geeigneten Mitteln eine namentlich genannte oder benennbare Person für sich allein oder auch stellvertretend für andere öffentlich vor dem Hintergrund der jeweils geltenden Werte im Bewußtsein der Menschen für immer vernichtend herabzusetzen".

18 See Neumann 1998, 549–550: "Die I[nvektive] verhandelt die Geschichtswürdigkeit von Personen; sie will bloßlegen und entlarven, was sich hinter einer Person verbirgt: sie destruiert die angemaßte Rolle und legt das vermeintliche wirkliche Wissen offen."

19 Cf. Neumann 1998, 550.

20 See chapter 8.

21 Cf. Flaig 1999, 66–67 discussing the topic of *damnatio memoriae* in the context of exemplification in general.

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